Uncommon Unity: the Promise of American Civil Religion, Post-Pluralism

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Uncommon Unity:

The Promise of American Civil Religion, Post-Pluralism

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Abstract

In 1967, Robert Bellah formulated the concept of American Civil Religion (ACR) to help explicate what it means to be an American. Underlying ACR is the premise that a common civil religion unifies Americans. With that premise, ACR's value – and its viability - depends on the relationship of ACR, pluralism, and national unity. Starting with an assumption that ACR's considerable value has not yet run its course, this thesis asks, "What factors, issues, and assumptions must be addressed and perhaps modified for American Civil Religion to a remain a credible descriptor of a common American identity?" After categorizing and surveying three threads of ACR scholarship, the thesis examines the data supporting America's increasingly religious pluralism and assesses it in the context of ACR. The thesis then analyzes the data that suggests that pluralism and ACR are negatively correlated. That is, as pluralism increases the strength of ACR decreases. Against that backdrop, the thesis returns to the three threads of ACR scholarship and discusses each scholarly trend as a response to increased pluralism. The thesis concludes by reviewing current attempts to change or replace ACR. It argues for keeping the framework that Bellah established in his original conception, while revisiting each of ACR's attributes to account for a more pluralistic America.

Dedication

      To those in my life who provide uncommon unity – Carla, Collin, Lincoln & Morgan. I love you.

      And for those who serve our great nation – wherever that service happens - in classrooms, in hospital wards, in combat zones, in precincts, in fire districts, and in all the varied places where we worship.

Acknowledgement

Dr. Stephen Shoemaker's exceptional guidance initially sparked the idea of this thesis, and then made it better at every turn. I am grateful for his impeccably timed mix of prodding and patience, his unfailingly insightful comments, his advocacy for my more plausible ideas, and, above all, his uncompromising insistence on intellectual integrity. Any value this work delivers is readily traceable to his oversight and support. All errors are solely mine.

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Chapter I

Introduction

In 1967, Robert Bellah formulated the concept of American Civil Religion (ACR) to help explicate what it means to be an American. Bellah described a common set of sacred beliefs that unify Americans, and in so doing established a framework for a wide range of subsequent scholarship.   This ACR literature explores whether such a set of beliefs exists and, if so, what are those beliefs, and what symbols and rituals pertain to the practice of ACR. Since 1967, America has become increasingly religiously diverse – what this thesis calls pluralism. The increasing prevalence of multiple religious traditions raises an important question about whether any ACR/national unity relationship is diminished - or perhaps enhanced - by an increase in pluralism. While others have considered the effect of pluralism on ACR, the literature to date does not address the effect of pluralism on ACR as a source of national unity. Given that ACR's purpose is to unify Americans, the value - if not the viability - of ACR depends on the relationship of ACR, pluralism, and national unity. Starting with an assumption that ACR's considerable value has not yet run its course, this thesis asks, "What factors, issues, and assumptions must be addressed and perhaps modified for American Civil Religion to a remain a credible descriptor of a common American identity?"

After surveying ACR scholarship in this introductory chapter, the second chapter will review the increase in religious pluralism in America since Bellah's seminal article,

and possible implications for the concept of ACR resulting from that increase. The third

chapter will examine the fluctuations in the prevalence or strength of ACR since 1967 to

the present. The fourth chapter surveys the scholarly responses to increased pluralism's

effect on ACR. Chapter five critiques the recent scholarly attempts to modify or supplant

ACR and then posits that, with specified changes to ACR's attributes, ACR will retain its

ability to unify Americans.

American Civil Religion: Definition and Development

This thesis will use the definition of ACR formulated by Robert Bellah in his

article *Civil Religion in America*. Bellah defined ACR as, "certain common elements of

religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. These have played a

crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious

dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere. This

public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am

calling American civil religion." (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 2).

The contemporary discussion of civil religion in America begins with Bellah's

identification of a unified, and more importantly unifying, set of American beliefs and

practices described in his 1967 article, *Civil Religion in America* (Bellah, "Civil

Religion"). Bellah's ACR acts as a definition of being an American vis-à-vis a non-

American. Much of the immediate conversation that followed Civil Religion in America

expounded, narrowed, or refined Bellah's view of civil religion as a means of defining

America's place in the world. This thread of conversation continues to the present. A

second theme of the ACR conversation began in the mid-1980s when scholars began to

look inwardly to apply ACR to American politics. The "culture wars" served as fertile

ground for exploring this use of ACR. Recently, a third thread has emerged that attempts

to reconcile the respective outward and inward-looking views of ACR. The discussion in

this introductory chapter describes the development of the literature starting with a

reading of Bellah that demonstrates how it provides a basis for the subsequent

conversations. Each of the three main threads of these conservations are then briefly

described.

The Baseline - Robert Bellah's Civil Religion in America

In what became the seminal work on the topic, Robert Bellah wrote an article in

1967 describing a collection of particularly American "beliefs, symbols and rituals" that

he contended are emblematic of "civil religion in American." (Bellah, "Civil Religion"

2). Drawing from leading figures in the War for Independence, the U.S. Civil War, and

the Vietnam War, Bellah found that America's collective social conscious recognizes the

four attributes of civil religion set out in Rousseau's The Social Contract (5).

Significantly, Bellah adds one uniquely American attribute – chosen-ness - or as Bellah

puts it, "[the] theme that lies very deep in the American tradition, namely the obligation,

both collective and individual, to carry out God's will on earth" (5). Consequently, the

five attributes of Bellah's ACR are chosen-ness, governmental tolerance toward religion,

God, punishment of evil and reward for good, and an afterlife. (5). Bellah then applies the

concept of American civil religion (ACR) as a basis for indicting America's involvement in the Vietnam War.

Bellah did not structure his article to directly explicate each of ACR's attributes. However, he does address each attribute in the course of developing his arguments that first, an American civil religion exists and second, that religion disfavors America's involvement in Vietnam. Bellah's treatment of each of ACR's five attributes adopts an outward-looking view. In sum, Bellah's ACR serves as a framework for understanding America's crucial role in the world. A framework that others have since sought to expand, revise, or refute. As a starting point for exploring ACR, a discussion of each of Bellah's five ACR attributes follows.

Chosen-ness Attribute

ACR, Bellah argues, "at its best is a genuine apprehension of universal and transcendent religious reality as seen in or, one could almost say, as revealed through the experiences of the American people" (12). Americans see experiences as influenced by a God pre-disposed to the American experiment. When describing the attributes of ACR, Bellah writes, "[God] is actively interested and involved in history, with a special concern for America" (7). Americans are then called by God to serve as examples to the rest of the world. Bellah calls this a "transcendent goal" and draws from the then-recent president John F. Kennedy's inaugural address for an example. Kennedy stated, "here on earth God's work must truly be our own." (4). Americans consider even the most domestic of affairs for their affairs' effect on the rest of the world. Discussing America's leader in its civil war, Bellah states that "[Lincoln's] task was, first of all, to save the Union – not for America alone but for the meaning of America to the rest of the world . .

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." (9). Bellah notes that the parallel of America to that of the chosen people of Israel is often cited in America's political discourse, starting with the very inception of the nation (10-11). Bellah's ACR points to an ultimate purpose where Americans are "concerned that America be a society as perfectly in accord with the will of God as men can make it, and a light to all the nations" (18).

Religious Tolerance Attribute

Religious tolerance is woven into the very fabric of America. The separation of church and state serves as a foundational pillar of the American experiment. The significant contribution Bellah makes is recognizing that America's civil religion is not a mere toleration of the religions that exist in America, but rather a religion unto itself that is wholly apart from the other religions that Americans observe (3). Throughout his discussion, Bellah demonstrates that ACR remains independent of and, at worst, innocuous to other religions practiced in America. More specifically, ACR and those religions co-exist and mutually support one another (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 3). Bellah notes that the "separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension" (3). He cites Presidents Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Kennedy, and Johnson's references to God, divine Providence, and the Almighty Being in their public addresses as demonstrating this religious dimension of American politics (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 6, 7). Importantly, Bellah's ACR assumes a strongly latitudinarian stance. He repeats and provides support for Eisenhower's position that, "[o]ur government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith – and I don't care what it is" (3). ACR's ability to cohabitate with other religions within the American soul is crucial to its

universal acceptance by all Americans. ACR's definition of God, discussed next, further supports this all-inclusive position to religion.

God Attribute

In Bellah's ACR, a particularly defined God serves as the linchpin of a unifying American belief system.   While acknowledging the evolving definition of God in America, Bellah finds that God occupies the status of a "central symbol in the civil religion from the beginning and remains so today" (15). The God of ACR is not YWHW or Christ's Father, but more unitarian in nature, albeit, "not only rather unitarian . . . but also on the austere side, much more related to order, law, and right than to salvation and love" (7). One can readily see how the will of such a God might manifest itself as a calling for Americans to serve the transcendent goal of providing an example to the world. The God of Bellah's ACR then is both a source of unification, a God which Americans can uniformly recognize, and a source of elevation, lifting citizenship to an ultimate purpose of serving as "a light to all the nations" (18). That is, a God that promotes an outward looking view of what it means to live and to die as an American.

Punish Evil and Reward Good Attribute

Bellah is clear that ACR "has not always been invoked in favor of worthy causes" (14). He points to three "times of trial" in support of this view.   The first time of trial was the War of Independence, and the question was whether Americans should "run our own affairs our own way" (16). America was rewarded for pursuing this inalienable right. The second time of trial was the Civil War, and the question was "the problem of full institutionalization of democracy within our country" (16). America was punished for

not honoring the inalienable rights of those within its borders. From these two times of trial, ACR was formed and furthered, respectively. Bellah posits that the third time of trial was the then ongoing Vietnam War, and the question was "the problem of action in a revolutionary world." Looking to Thoreau, Bellah warns that the ACR that emerged in the course of the first two times of trial now argues for America to forge a "viable and coherent world order" (18) and not to "rely on our overwhelming physical power rather than our intelligence" when dealing with military confrontation (17). It is unmistakable then that Bellah is positing that the former will be rewarded, and the latter punished. In Bellah's ACR, conflict serves as the crucible for determining whether America merits reward or punishment.

Afterlife Attribute

It is telling of itself that of all the ACR attributes, Bellah gives the least attention to afterlife. Bellah's ACR is pragmatic: largely concerned with the morality of Americans' actions in the here and now. He touches on the afterlife only implicitly when discussing Americans sacrificing their lives for America's interests (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 10). Quoting Robert Lowell, Bellah equates American soldiers' sacrifice to that of Christian sacrifice, with both promising the martyrs that their sacrifice will yield a better state after their death. When discussing Lincoln, Bellah suggests that Lincoln incorporated this promise of a better America through sacrifice into ACR. Thereafter, giving "the last full measure of devotion" took on religious overtones (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 11). When viewed as an outward looking religion charged with defining the American experience during conflict, this version of an enduring legacy as afterlife is enough.

Responses to Bellah

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the benefit of hindsight, Bellah's article sparked academic interest in ACR from multiple disciplines including religion, sociology, and political science for the next five decades. The discourse on ACR may be segregated into three sequential categories. First, the initial response to Bellah's articulation of ACR began shortly after the publication of Civil Religion in America and continues to the present. This category of ACR scholarship retains Bellah's view that ACR is outward looking and/or conflict oriented. In the late 1980s, as the cold war subsided and the "culture wars" began, a second category of ACR scholarship emerged. That thread of scholarship turned the focus of ACR, particularly its aspect of defining what it means to be an American, inwardly to examine Americans' relationship to one another. About a decade ago, a third thread of scholarship developed that sought to more formally account for ACR's in both outward and inward-looking contexts. To date, that effort has most notably taken the form of seeking to redefine ACR in some way that accommodates changes in America since Bellah's 1967 article.

First Thread of Responses: The Unifying Character of ACR

Bellah's work sparked an exceptional volume of scholarship. Although a crude measure, it is noteworthy that a Hollis search of "American civil religion" yields no results in the 10 years prior to Bellah's article and 201 during the 10 years following it.

The initial responses to Bellah's article covered a wide-range of topics. Some criticized Bellah's characterizing the "beliefs, symbols and rituals" he described in defining ACR as a religion (Richardson; E. Smith; cf. Novak). Others sought to further the analysis of certain of those elements including the role of the president (Pierard and Linder) and symbols such as America's holidays and flag (Warner) and, more substantively, the values of civil religion at individual, societal, and cultural levels (Fenn 1974). Some explored the theoretical underpinnings of ACR with a debate emerging as to whether Bellah grounded ACR in Rousseau's top-down (nation-individual) formulation or Emile Durkheim's bottom-up (individual-nation) approach (Hammond; Herberg; Mathisen; Wallace). Yet others elucidated the distinction between "civil religion" and other similar concepts such as "civil piety", "religious nationalism", and "public religion" (McGuire; Stackhouse). Among the more interesting works of this type is John Murray Cuddihy's analysis that concludes civil religion is normatively subversive to non-mainstream religions and, as a result, positively creates "incivility" in Americans (Cuddihy 94). Finally, some scholars expanded or deepened Bellah's framework for ACR (Marty; Noble; Neuhaus; Ross; Wolin). Among this group, Martin Marty's work proved a particularly useful advancement. Marty created a matrix for the kinds of civil religion with "prophetic or priestly" as one set of options and "self-transcendent or transcendent deity" as the other set of options. Marty then described the four variations that emerge from combining the factors with the priestly/ transcendent deity variation being the most unapologetic proponent of "America right or wrong" (147) and the prophetic/ self-transcendent being the most likely to call America to task for its actions (153). Notably,

even the most introspective version of Marty's ACR served as means of American defining themselves relative to the rest of the world.

That attribute of ACR as a unifying force is constant for this entire first segment of ACR scholarship. Despite this segment's wide-ranging topics and levels of discourse, Bellah's concept of ACR is an outward-looking theology that defined Americans as a unified group distinct from others is present in each commentary. This perception of ACR and its role continues in scholars' work after the emergence of the second strain of ACR scholarship discussed below, and continues to the present (Marvin and Ingle; Haberski).

The Second Thread: The Civil Distinction in ACR

The second wave of ACR scholarship turned its focus inward - to ACR as a means to distinguish some Americans from their fellow citizens. These scholars focused on the "civil" or political aspects of ACR and its use by those across the political spectrum to defend their respective visions of what it means to be American. This segment of ACR scholarship emerged in earnest with Ronald Reagan's rise to the Presidency (Gamwell, Adams, Wald). These scholars argue that ACR's unifying effect as articulated in Bellah's article was giving way to a view that true Americans adhered to certain political beliefs and that ACR supported the correctness of those political beliefs. In their 1985 article "Civil Religion in an Uncivil Society" Demerath and Williams encapsulate the fundamental premise of these arguments. They posit, "America may be becoming too fragmented, polarized, and secular for a substantive consensus to remain at its core" (164). They then find that in sum, "deepening structural and cultural divisions suggest that our recent political displays of patriotism and national pride are a form of

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bravado from a confused body politic rather than a true affirmation of civil religion itself"

(164). They then call for analysis of how groups "use versions of civil religion to frame,

articulate, and legitimate their own particular political and moral visions" (166).

Robert Wuthnow did such an analysis. In a 1988 article, Wuthnow describes a

conservative ACR that emphasizes America evangelizing the world not only with

Christianity but also with capitalism (Wuthnow, "Divided" 396). He contrasts this with a

liberal version of ACR that assigns responsibility to America for fixing the problems of

the human condition because America possesses the resources to addresses those

problems (397). Thus, Wuthnow generally equates the conservative ACR with

conservative political positions and liberal ACR with liberal political stances.

Stephen Carter then took a different slant on the role of ACR in politics. Carter

found that civil religion muted the voices of those who would espouse their religious

views as the basis for public policy (Carter 52). ACR, in Carter's view, was the only

accepted religion for the "public square" and accordingly effectively removed Christian

and other traditions' religious considerations from the public policy debates and political

discourse (53). Some 8 years after his first article, Wuthnow revisited his conservative

ACR/liberal ACR discussion and, perhaps with Carter's observations in mind, speculated

that ACR was now peculiarly an elitist political tool left to the "activists, clergy, and

other leaders who have some professional or political stake in advancing particular

issues" (Wuthnow, "Faith" 17). Rather than the unifying source that the first phase

scholars assign to ACR, the second phase scholars ultimately conclude that ACR is cast

as a source of division along political lines. As with the first thread, this second thread of

scholarship continues to the present (Silk 2012).

Third Thread: Religious Distinction in ACR

As noted above, Bellah retained Rousseau's religious tolerance element when formulating his version of ACR.   Yet, he recognized the Judeo-Christian underpinnings of ACR and the utility of this foundation for unifying Americans. Both the first and second threads of scholarship leave the religious tolerance attribute largely undisturbed. A recent, third thread of scholarship is beginning to examine if ACR must now be redefined to account for a significantly more religiously diverse America than the one in which Bellah first constructed ACR. Peter Luchau's "Toward a Contextualized Concept of Civil Religion" can be read as an attempt to synthesize Marty's two civil religions and Wuthnow's conservative versus liberal ACRs. Luchau's undertakes this synthesis to account, at least in part, for the increased diversity of religious views in societies like America (Luchau 378-80). He argues that ACR must be redefined and broadened to account for a level of religious tolerance that as yet has not been contemplated (383-84).

Similarly, Jose Santiago focuses on Durkheim's emphasis on civil religion as a sociological phenomenon that provides a common sense of the sacred (Santiago 395). Santiago explicates Bellah and Martin Marty, among others, in these terms. He concludes that the foundation of civil religion as a unified view that no longer exists in modern society. With a nod to Max Weber, Santiago concludes that, "[r]eligion has lost its capacity to bring together different sacred forms under the one united banner of a moral universe" (399) and accordingly, the "theory of defending the idea of contemporary societies integrated through a collection of standards and values should be empirically tested" (400). In effect, he argues that civil religion – at least as it is currently defined and applied – may no longer effectively serve a purpose.

In summary, the first thread of ACR scholarship demonstrates the consistency of ACR over time. The second and third threads demonstrate ACR's dynamic nature in response to changes in American politics and society. The following chapters explore the changes in American religious landscape at certain mileposts, the changes in relative strength of ACR at those same points in time, the effect of pluralism on ACR, and ACR scholars' accounting of these changes. The thesis concludes by postulating that ACR's value, both as a valid description of and a contributor to American unity, may be sustained by retaining Bellah's original framework while redefining ACR's attributes to better reflect the Americans we have become.

Chapter II

Measuring American Religious Pluralism

From Bellah to the Present

One important test of a concept's value is that it operates effectively in

environments that change from one period to the next. That is, the concept passes the

"test of time". ACR scholars faced a different make-up of religions in America from

ACR's inception to the present. This chapter examines how the different levels of

religious pluralism at three "mileposts" - 1970, 1995, and 2015 - contributed to the

changing landscape in which ACR scholars produced their work.

 First, the data for religious diversity in America at the 1970 milepost is set out

followed by a discussion of the reasons America was overwhelmingly a Judeo-Christian

nation at that point in time. Next, the pluralism data at the 1995 milepost is set out

followed by a discussion of the reasons for America becoming more pluralistic. Then, the

data for the 2015 milepost is set out followed by a discussion of the emergence of

"religions" in America that include no affiliation with previously recognized, established

religions.

This chapter's second section posits general implications of increasing religious

pluralism for each attribute of Bellah's ACR, noting whether pluralism strengthens,

weakens, or has no effect on those attributes. This chapter, along with the discussion in

Chapter 3 of the changes in the prevalence of ACR over time, set the groundwork for

explicating the specific outcomes for each thread of ACR scholarship at each milepost. The thesis takes up those specific outcomes to scholarship in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis with a defense of Bellah's ACR framework while arguing for redefining certain of its attributes.

1970 Milepost Data

Bellah's America was a Christian nation. From 1948 to 2016, Gallup conducted polls that determined with a high level of confidence the makeup of Americans' religious affiliations (Gallup Religion 2016). The 1970 version of the Gallup poll found 94% of the country identified as Christian, with another 2% identifying as Jewish. The other 4% merited only the categories "Other" or "None." The first chart that follows depicts the relative levels as surveyed by Gallup.

Figure 1: Americans' Religious Affiliations in 1970

Americans' Religious Affiliations in 1970

[Bar chart showing 1970 data. Y-axis ranges from 0% to 100% in 20% increments. A single bar for "1970" shows a large light gray section (Judeo-Christian) taking up most of the bar, with a thin black section (Other, None) at the top near 100%.]

Legend:
■ Other, None
■ Judeo-Christian (Protestant, Catholic, Jewish)
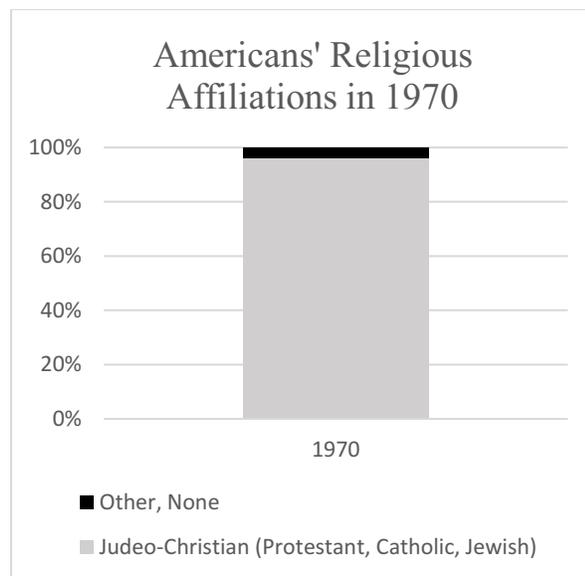
Source: Gallup Religion (2016)

Clearly, the Judeo-Christian affiliation overwhelmingly predominated. Other religions, no matter how far removed from or how similar to Christianity (or to one another, for that matter), merited only an aggregated category of "Other".

The lumped category of "Other" meant that all that mattered was that you were not a Christian, or to a nearly equivalent extent, not Judeo-Christian. In effect, if you were a Muslim, Buddhist, Atheist, or Rastafarian your specific beliefs were largely irrelevant. More amorphous possibilities, such as "spiritual but religious" almost certainly were not intended to be captured in the survey results, and perhaps did not even serve as possibilities for defining the respondents' *own* views of their religious affiliation. In sum, Judeo-Christianity writ-large served as an apt descriptor of nearly all Americans near the time Bellah wrote his seminal article.

Reasons for the Level of Pluralism in 1970

A full discourse of how America started and persisted as a Christian nation is well beyond the scope of this thesis. That said, a cursory review of the factors that led to the undeniable prominence of Christianity in 1967 when Bellah published "Civil Religion" will aid in understanding ACR in the intervening periods until now. As a starting point, Bellah observed that several of America's most notable founders such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin refused to affiliate with churches (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 12). Others like Thomas Paine incontrovertibly were not Christian (Gaustad 135). Nevertheless, from its earliest days, in sum America was a Christian nation (de Tocqueville 170) The religious motivations of the earliest European immigrants to America set the stage for Christianity's indelible imprimatur on American society. Attending church was an engrained component of the American life and "church" meant Christian churches (de Tocqueville 243). The American Revolution did little to alter the Christian aspect of Americans' identity (de Tocqueville 174). Thus, from its founding the United States was at the outset a Christian nation. It maintained such a status to the point of Bellah's ACR by virtue of two equally powerful forces: periodic revitalization, and punishment for contrarians.

Christianity became intertwined with the American identity not only as a result of positive reinforcement but also from ostracizing non-Christians. The Second Great Revival in the early to mid-nineteenth century solidified and strengthened America's Christian identity and gave it a strong evangelical element (Gaustad 140). From its Judeo-Christian roots and heritage, the evangelical nature of Christianity in America led to its self-perpetuation. Accordingly, nearly all of one's neighbors attended a Christian

church and shared a common vocabulary regarding God and the sacred, as well as a similar conception of sin and Christ as the sole source of salvation (de Tocqueville 168). Revivalism was not motivated by a perceived need to convert non-believers as much as to make passive believers active ones, what Jonathan Edwards called the two Christian "armies": the New Light revivalists and the Old Light Christians (Gaustad 61). The revivals' framing of the question as, "What is a good Christian?" rather than as "Should you be a Christian?" underscores the prominence of Christianity in America.

Augmenting this positive reinforcement, non-adherence to Christianity subjected one to a form of second-class citizenship, or even classification as sub-human or as a threat to civil society. Even among Christians, full acceptance of each other was not always complete. The "anti-papist" sentiment expressed by some protestants evidences this (Gaustad 59). More extremely still, reactions to Native Americans' totem and nature-based religions demonstrate the potential for "other pagan" religions to serve as a putative justification for abusive practices as far reaching as exile from native lands and genocide. As an early example, in the 1630s, Captain John Underwood infamously justified the killing of Pequot women and children because "[w]e had sufficient light from the word of God for our proceedings" (Gaustad 11).

Against this backdrop, the positive and punitive reinforcement for Christianity persisted well into the mid-twentieth century (Gaustad 336-37, 371). Very near in time to the 1970 milepost, the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s laid bare several of the distinctions that Americans saw when they looked at one another. Americans came to recognize several factors that they needed either to incorporate into a shared American identity or, failing that, to watch as those factors divided the nation. Race was first and

foremost among these factors. Other factors challenging the historical definitions of an

"American" included economic status and gender equality in the workplace (Sacks 538).

Religious affiliation did not act as a distinguishing factor at the time of Bellah's

formulation of ACR. Rather, the very high percentage of Americans that self-identified as

Judeo-Christian in the 1970 Gallup poll suggests that religious affiliation remained a

unifying factor, rather than a dividing one.

<div align="center">1995 Milepost Data</div>

By 1995, the potential for American religious diversity began to show signs of

coming to fruition. While the 1970 version of the Gallup poll determined that 96% of

Americans identified as Judeo-Christians, in 1995, 87% of Americans identified

themselves this way. Of at least equal import, the religions about which Gallup captured

discrete data began to increase between 1970 and 1995. In 1970, the religions consisted

of Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Others, and None. In 1995, Gallup added "Mormons" and

"No Answer". The addition of "No Answer" suggests that "None" now indicated a lack

of affiliation with a religion where "No Answer" indicated no religion whatsoever. Other

polling organizations used this use of "None" in their surveys as well (Russell). Depicted

graphically, the increase in pluralism appears as,

Figure 2: Americans' Religious Affiliations in 1970 and 1995
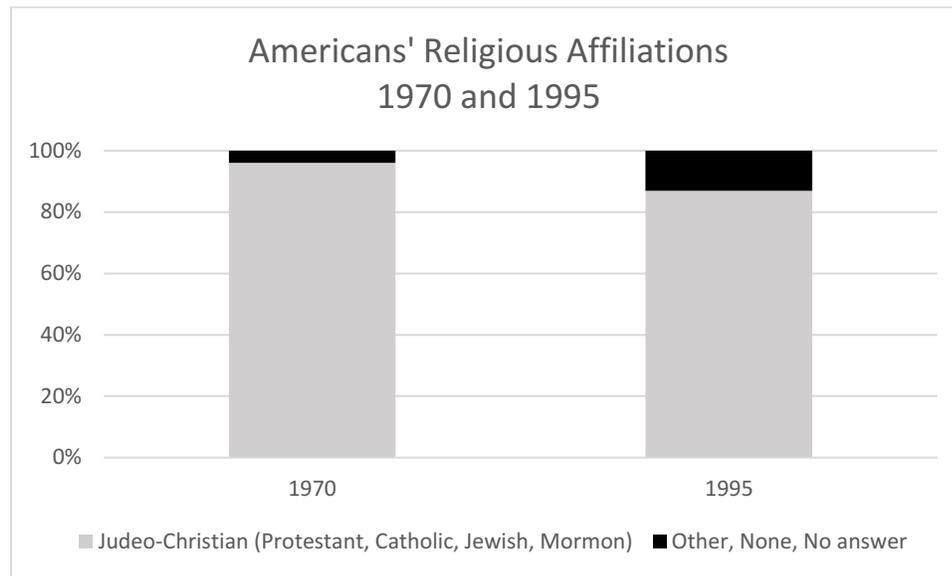
Source: Gallup Religion (2016)

Reasons for the Level of Pluralism in 1995

The reasons for the increased level of religious pluralism may be attributed to internal and external factors. Internally, the cultural revolution served as a trigger for the increase in pluralism and the following culture wars accelerated the pace of the increase. America's cultural revolution did not immediately manifest itself as an appreciable level of religious diversity – the 1970 Milepost's lack of pluralism refutes that notion. It did however make questioning core beliefs both acceptable to the general populace and encouraged by a vocal segment of society (Eck 209). As Bellah's *Civil Religion in America* itself signifies, Vietnam pushed Americans to question previously unassailable premises: Americans unite against a common enemy; American leaders act for the public good; and Americans fight on the side of righteousness. Vietnam, as theologian

Richard Neuhaus framed it was, "God's instrument for bring(ing) the American empire to its knees" (Haberski 93).

In the context of Vietnam, it became painfully evident that American unity was not a given. The Pentagon papers showed Presidents lie, and about important things that cost lives (Arendt). Later, Watergate demonstrated that American leaders who bore the putative obligation to protect and serve actually possessed, if not unfathomable, at least previously unrecognized levels of malice and disillusion (Bernstein 112-30; Dean 92*ff*). It became entirely plausible that patriotism demanded Americans to protest its own injustice to the same extent they fought injustice abroad (Haberski 92). Against this backdrop, Americans came to scrutinize other "givens" that never caused concern before. For displaced or contemplative Americans, the "givens" could include their religious convictions (Porterfield 135). Accordingly, the cultural revolution gave Christians cause to consider changing their religious affiliation, thereby increasing pluralism within their own ranks. In this way, the cultural revolution's impetus to reconsider religious affiliation prompted an increase in diversity during the culture wars that followed.

Where the cultural revolution created an environment that fostered questioning, the culture wars created an environment that fostered adopting a position (Carter 59-60). If, upon examination, Americans found their then-current religious affiliation wanting, the culture wars prompted them to adopt a new religious affiliation. As the name implies, the culture wars did not countenance ambivalence (Dallmayr i-iii). The cultural revolution and culture wars combined to give Americans the reason and the opportunity, respectively, to redefine their religious affiliations.

That said, a reason and an opportunity were necessary but insufficient contributors to increased diversity. The additional necessary factor was viable alternatives to a Judeo-Christian affiliation. Without such alternatives, redefining one's religion meant moving from one form of Christianity or Judaism to another. That is, once one asked, "Is my current religion the one I choose?", concluded it was not, and faced an impetus to adopt an alternative, the pertinent question then became "what could replace it?" To answer that question, America needed to look outside itself if for no other reason than that America was so predominantly Christian, it had few alternatives to offer. So, while a reason and an opportunity were contributing variables to increased pluralism that arose from sources within America, this third variable of alternatives largely occurred from external sources.

The alternatives to Christianity came in no small part from America's increased exposure to eastern religious thought. Both fundamental and more mystical eastern religious thoughts gained greater exposure and acceptance in the American social consciousness (Porterfield 131). The international religious influences manifested themselves in media, the academy, and political debates (Gaustad 398, 412, 424). As discussed above, the most pertinent sign of the proliferation of alternative religious affiliations for measuring increased pluralism is the Gallup survey's decline in Judeo-Christian affiliations. The 1995 Milepost reflects that pluralism moved from the concept of a society that supported multiple religions at the 1970 Milepost to an actual phenomenon within American society.

2015 Milepost Data

The 2015 milepost demonstrates that increased pluralism reflected a fundamental, enduring change in the American religious landscape. Recall that in 1970, 4 % of Americans affiliated with a religion other than Christianity and that in1995 it was 13%. In 2015, it doubled to 27%. The graph below depicts these changes.

Figure 3: Americans' Religious Affiliations in 1970, 1995, and 2015
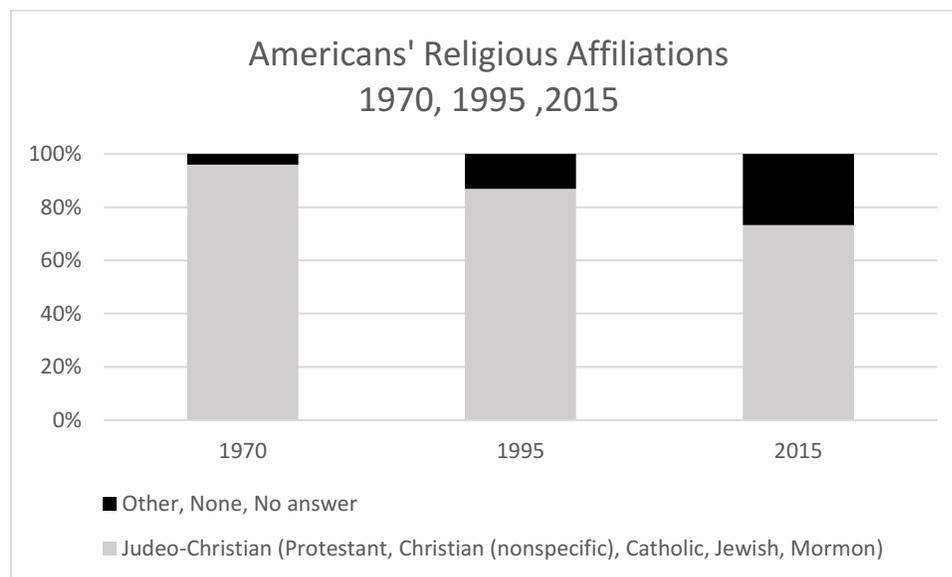
Source: Gallup Religion (2016)

The affiliations captured in the Gallup survey changed modestly between 1995 and 2015 versions except for the addition of "Christian (nonspecific)." Of greater note for pluralism is the increase in the "None" category. The "None" category was intended

to capture respondents who are unaffiliated with an established religion (Russell). The "None" category effectively tripled at each milepost with increases from 2% in 1970 (when it also included the "No Answer" respondents) to 6% in 1995 to 17% in 2015 (Gallup Religion 2016). This growth in "Nones" might plausibly be interpreted as a broadening of the definition of religion to include a non-sectarian, informal religion category. As many as 8% of these respondents may fall into the ambiguous classification of "spiritual but not religious" (Lipski and Gecewicz).

An equally plausible interpretation is that the increase in "Nones" is an acknowledgment of less religiosity in American society. Likely, the increase reflects a combination of these two factors. What is clearer is that religious pluralism continued to appreciably increase between the second and third mileposts.

Reasons for the Level of Pluralism in 2015

At the 2015 milepost and since then, Americans face a political gridlock, polarized positions on significant social issues, and violence as the extreme response to other Americans who hold opposing views. With the benefit of hindsight, the division near the 1970 milepost centered on America's role in the world vis-à-vis Vietnam. At the 2015 milepost, after the turmoil of Vietnam and the ensuing culture wars had taken their toll, the causes of the divisions were legion. America polled as more divided than at any time since Vietnam - when Bellah first posited the notion of ACR (Gallup Politics). Religion, Christian and otherwise, clearly was among them (Pew Fact Tank). More than the common practices of religious groups endorsing controversial political figures and religious leaders' rhetoric promoting social stances that exclude others, religion in many

instances came to be a shibboleth for the tribe to which one belonged. The most-ready example of this association is fundamentalist Christians being associated, almost without exception, with conservative political positions and politicians (Silk 33-34). Against this backdrop, the increase in pluralism seems to have little to no mitigating effect on the divisive quality associated with religion.

<div align="center">The Effect of Pluralism on Each Attribute of ACR</div>

As discussed in Chapter One, Bellah identified and described the attributes of ACR as: chosen-ness, meaning a divine influence in favor of the American experiment; religious toleration, meaning a penchant for allowing a wide range of recognized religions; a deity, meaning an intelligible, pragmatic God readily identifiable by Judeo-Christians; punishment and reward, meaning America's status reflects its degree of righteousness as an actor in the world; and an afterlife, meaning the American sacrifice has enduring meaning. Considering each attribute separately, a cursory discussion follows of how Bellah initially came to these definitions in light of the relative lack of pluralism in America at the first milepost. For the subsequent two mileposts, the thesis will discuss how increased pluralism affected the original definitions of each attribute.

Chosen-ness and Pluralism

As described in the first chapter, Bellah points to America's belief in its exceptionalism as an attribute of ACR. Bellah justifiably saw Americans' perception of exceptionalism as stemming from their belief in a divinely ordained place for America in

the world (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 12). Americans' common Judeo-Christian religious

orientation supported this view. Specifically, America as the "new Israel" made the most

sense from a Christian vantage (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 7, 9). The shared historical

experience of the colonial founders was an American story to be sure. But it also was a

story about Christians making their way in a world that needed "a city on the hill". In this

sense, the point of origin for American exceptionalism took the form of a Christian event.

A lack of pluralism then made this event all the more meaningful at the 1970 Milepost

when 'American' was nearly synonymous with 'Christian.' Because chosen-ness carried

this Christian connotation, the relative lack of pluralism supported Bellah's contention

that chosen-ness is an attribute of ACR.

Effect of Increased Pluralism. The increase in pluralism at the 1995 and 2015

mileposts intuitively leads to a relaxed belief in America's exceptionalism. Bellah's

contention that the exceptionalism claim is founded on a "city on the hill" presumption

resonates with religious scholars who point to John Winthrop's use of that phrase as an

explicit mandate for American Puritans to be examples to others (Silk 34). A "city on a

hill" as the basis for America's exceptionalism stemmed from Christians seeking refuge

from persecution (Gaustad 51). Given this Christian heritage for the exceptionalism

claim, the introduction and growing prevalence of non-Christians in America would seem

to dampen an affinity for exceptionalism. Since the non-Christians have less impetus to

appreciate the historical heritage that underpins the "city on a hill" claim (Silk 34),

pluralism counters the ACR's exceptionalism attribute. Some commentators contend that

just such a decline has in fact occurred (Walt). Accordingly, ACR appears in need of a

new theory of American exceptionalism that accounts for an increasingly pluralistic America.

Religious Tolerance and Pluralism

At first view, low pluralism may seem to counter, rather than promote, ACR's second element of religious toleration.   After all, wouldn't religious toleration manifest itself in higher pluralism than that occurring at the 1970 milepost? Stated differently, would a nation dedicated to religious tolerance, all else equal, not have a religiously diverse citizenship? And if so, isn't a low level of pluralism a tell-tale sign that religious toleration is not an attribute of a country's civil religion? So, why does Bellah include religious tolerance as an element of ACR? Likely, for two reasons.

First, although ACR does not distinguish among denominations, Christianity is not monolithic. *Within* Christianity, America accommodated a far-reaching range of sects and on this narrow criteria America was religiously diverse. Whether a Christian fell along a spectrum that ran along doctrinal characteristics - such as perhaps Southern Baptist on one end and Catholicism on the other - or along a continuum of structural formality - such as one anchored on one end by Christian non-denominational churches and by the Episcopal church on the other - America did little to limit religious practice or otherwise impair citizenship of Christians. In this sense, America demonstrated religious tolerance, albeit tolerance that largely extended to different types of Christians.

Second, Americans' rhetoric, if not practice, strongly supported religious toleration. For Americans, the idea of toleration was encapsulated by "separation of church and state." The church and state separation had historical significance, political

power, legal consequence, and cultural implications (Cristi and Dawson 324). That is, the rhetoric of religious tolerance was intricately woven into the fabric of America's identity. Likely for these reasons, Bellah determined that the religious toleration of different stripes of Christians and toleration as deep-rooted ideal existed predominantly enough to include religious tolerance as an attribute ACR.

Effect of Increased Pluralism. Increased pluralism promotes religious toleration. As an increasing number of Americans assumed affiliations placing them in the religious minority, intuitively these minority members supported increased levels of religious pluralism. The thinking may be that more pluralism enables religious minorities to practice their religion without sacrificing political, social, or economic benefits. This model would suggest that a religious plurality without a religious majority provides the most religious freedom and is consistent with the American ideal of religious toleration. However true, this conception of American religious pluralism remains unproven. That is, Bellah formulated ACR under a circumstance where religious toleration was an ideal, not a reality. On the contrary pluralism may not necessarily lead to acceptance of fellow citizens, but to an "others within" mentality whereby those with different religious are granted no tolerance (Eck 22, 47). If pluralism leads to intolerance, the question of ACR's viability becomes more tenuous (see Dallmayr 90-91).

Definition of God and Pluralism

Of all of Bellah's ACR attributes, the one that pluralism poses the greatest risk of disrupting is Bellah's description of God as a deity that is an intelligible, pragmatic, and readily identifiable by Judeo-Christians. Bellah saw such a deity as a necessary attribute

for ACR (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 16). For a country where 96% of its citizens were

Judeo-Christian, ACR's God defined in this way provided a touchstone for common

belief in ACR's other attributes. It served this function while doing little or no violence

to Americans' belief in a Judeo-Christian God (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 15). Even so,

Bellah recognized that the God of ACR may not be as readily identifiable to Americans

in the future (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 16). He made a generalized query about the effect

of increased pluralism. That query seems especially well placed in the context of his

definition of ACR's God. Will that ACR God be the same in a pluralistic America?

    Effect of Increased Pluralism. Pluralism weakens the utility of Bellah's definition

of ACR's God because some, but not all, non-Judeo-Christian Americans find such a

God less familiar. Other religions' conceptions of deity, however, do not fall squarely

into Bellah's definition of the ACR God. For example, a Buddhist conception of deity, to

the extent that description applies at all, is less intelligible than the Judeo-Christian God

who hears prayer and acts in humans' lives. Similarly, multi-deistic religions such as

Hinduism does not have a conception of deity that readily comports with the description

of ACR's God. In contrast, the Abrahamic Muslim conception of Allah fits well with the

ACR God that Bellah describes. The open question then is, "Can these alternative

definitions of God be squared - or do they even need to be - for ACR to persist as a

unifying force in American life?"

Punishment and Reward and Pluralism

    ACR's attribute of punishment and reward based on the righteousness of America

as an actor in the world resonates well with the Judeo-Christian.   The idea that acting

29

according to a set of precepts that are either righteous or sinful will result in reward or

punishment is familiar to Judeo-Christians who are well-versed in tenets of sin and

salvation. Equally familiar is the idea that errors may be rectified by repenting and

returning to a proper course of action. Bellah borrows from this paradigm to incorporate

punishment and reward as an attribute of ACR. Bellah used this attribute as the basis for

evaluating America's actions at pivotal times. Per Bellah, these "times of trial" pitted

proper action against improper and tested America's resolve to act righteously. The

Revolutionary War tested America's resolve for independence, the Civil War its resolve

for freedom, and the Vietnam War its resolve to act responsibly in a "revolutionary

world" (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 16).   Bellah clearly implies that America acted properly

in the first two times of trial and was rewarded with independence and prosperity,

respectively. The lament in Bellah's article is that America may be acting improperly in

the third time of trial and may be punished accordingly (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 18). To

a near-unanimously Judeo-Christian nation, such an argument makes sense and, further,

justifies Bellah's inclusion of punishment and reward as an attribute of ACR.

Effect of Increased Pluralism. The antecedent increase in pluralism makes the

association with the religious reward/punishment framework at least somewhat less

accessible to America in its entirety. Some non-Judeo-Christian religions have a

comparable reward/punishment concept similar to Judeo-Christian tenet of sin and

salvation. For instance, Hindu notions of karma associate current right action with higher

ascendency in subsequent lives. Other religions however have a less pronounced

relationship between action and consequence. For instance, rather than sin leading to

punishment and repentance to salvation, the focal point of the Islamic tradition focuses on

remembering Allah. For Muslims, right action is that which recalls Allah. Buddhism

also views reward and punishment only as a derivative offshoot of right living through

the eight-fold noble path. Buddhists do not associate progress toward Nirvana so much

as salvation from sin but as a means of escaping suffering. Wrong action allows

suffering to persist but does not cause it; suffering exists as a fundamental premise.

Human desire requires no human effort. In this way, Buddhism incorporates a different

reward/punishment framework, albeit for a more eudemonic purpose of "progress for

progress's sake." These major religions demonstrate that increased pluralism translates to

more Americans who have a less direct affinity for the ACR attribute of religious reward

and punishment at least as cast in terms of sin and salvation. Thus, pluralism may be

expected to decrease ACR's strength on this attribute.

Afterlife and Pluralism

Bellah gave only a passing nod to the concept of an afterlife within the context of

ACR, and there is little to analyze in the context of increased pluralism. For Bellah,

afterlife for ACR purposes means American sacrifice has enduring meaning. For

Christians, this attribute of ACR was not inconsistent with the afterlife of heaven or hell.

Effect of Increased Pluralism. Interestingly, the ACR afterlife attribute appears to

have an ecumenical appeal as well. Buddhist nirvana, Hindu karma, and even religions

where no existence beyond this life is contemplated, such as some sects of Judaism, all

can accommodate American sacrifice having enduring meaning. Thus, an increase in

pluralism appears to be a neutral factor for the afterlife attribute of ACR.

In summary, this chapter shows that pluralism in America increased significantly in each period from 1970 to 1995 and from 1995 to 2015, resulting in a substantial change to the religious landscape in America. When considering the effects of these changes to ACR, an intuition-based analysis suggests that pluralism acts as an eroding force against ACR and attendantly erodes the American unity that ACR putatively delivers. Specifically, pluralism decreases the efficacy of ACR by diminishing ACR attributes of chosen-ness, reward and punishment, and ACR's God.   Starting with these intuited results, Chapter 3 will set out and examine data that tests the accuracy of this intuition. Chapter 4 will discuss the implications for ACR scholarship for the pluralism and ACR trends. Chapter 5 will defend the existing framework while providing recommendations to its attributes for future ACR scholars to consider.

Chapter III

Measuring Pluralism's Effect on American Civil Religion:

A Comparison Over Time

As Chapter 2 demonstrated, Bellah's America is not today's America. For religious scholars, pluralism significantly altered and continues to reshape America's religious landscape. Against this backdrop, the impact of the changes to ACR's viability comes into question. This chapter takes up that question and analyzes available data to assess ACR's relative strength over time. The results lead to the conclusion that ACR is in decline. The following chapter will explore how ACR scholars have reacted to the increase in pluralism and decline in ACR. The final chapter identifies changes to ACR's attributes that future scholars may consider as means of reviving and maintaining ACR's viability.

ACR Strength Over Time - Method of Measurement and

the ACR-Pluralism Relationship Over Time

In contrast to the Gallup surveys on pluralism, there is not a single source for tracking ACR's strength over time. While such a longitudinal, time-based study does not exist, different scholars have assessed the existence and strength of ACR at certain, given points in time. The studies differ in the measurement techniques each used. The

questions asked in surveys and the statistical tools employed are not consistent. This

means that a statistically reliable comparison of the results cannot be made.

Nevertheless, a rough analysis of the ACR at three points in time is possible because both

pluralism data and ACR data exist at each point. That is, data is available from points in

time very near to the ones for pluralism reviewed in the previous chapter. This is

intentional, and the Chapter 2 pluralism data points were selected knowing that

comparable ACR data points existed at very nearly the same mileposts. Accordingly, in

this chapter, the same three mileposts of 1970, 1995, and 2015 will be analyzed to assess

the relationship of pluralism and ACR over time.

1970 Milepost: Strong Identifiable Version of ACR Present in the United States

In 1970, three years after Bellah's Civil Religion in America, several scholars

surveyed the attendees of a Christian evangelist meeting, a Billy Graham crusade in

North Carolina, about their beliefs. The scholars chose this population to survey because

they were interested not only in determining if ACR existed, but also, if it did, in the

relative strength of ACR to more recognized religious beliefs. The survey included

questions intended to address the respondents' beliefs in Bellah's ACR tenets as well as

certain elements Christian doctrine. Ninety-eight percent of the respondents completing

the survey were protestant Christians (Wimberley 894). That the reputable scholars who

authored an all-protestant respondent pool was deemed credible is itself a telling aspect

of the early reviews of ACR. America's overwhelmingly Christian population justified

this approach to data collection. Interestingly, two percent of the pool who initially

agreed to participate in the survey identified themselves as Catholic or Jewish, but none

completed the survey. (Wimberley 894-5).

The survey statements that were clustered as representative ACR tenets are:

- "America is God's chosen nation today";

- "To me, the flag of the United States is sacred";

- "Human rights come from God and not merely from laws"; and

- "If government does not support religion, government cannot uphold morality."

The strength of the respondents' collective belief in these statements measured at over 93%, indicating a very strong level of belief in Bellah's ACR. (Wimberley 897).

The religious items that were clustered as representative of religious belief were:

- life after death,

- the Devil's existence,

- Christ's return,

- Biblical authenticity,

- miracles, and

- punishment of sin.

(Wimberley 895-897). The strength of the respondents' collective belief in these statements measured at over 90% also indicated a very strong level of belief but slightly *less than* the belief in the Bellah's ACR tenets (Wimberley 897-8). Because of its focused population of participants, this survey's results cannot be read to apply broadly to all U.S. citizens in 1970. Only protestant Christians participated, and from among that group, all survey participants were attendees of an evangelical Christian event. Nevertheless, as Chapter 2 detailed, Christians were a very significant majority of the U.S. in 1970. Further, Billy Graham was an exceptionally popular figure in America

with a 1957 Gallup poll finding that 85% of Americans could identify Graham and 75%

viewed him favorably (Gallup 1957).   Thus, while the survey participants were a non-

representative subset of the *entire* population, they represented a very substantial majority

of the population.   And this very substantial representative group overwhelmingly

recognized and adhered to the ACR Bellah described. Wimberley justifiably concludes

that ACR in the 1970s was independent of mainstream religion – that is, that ACR did in

fact exist as an independently recognizable set of beliefs. (Wimberley 989). And further,

Wimberley substantiates that ACR's tenets were widely recognized – that is, that ACR

was a widely held, unifying aspect of American life.

1995 Milepost: ACR in Decline

A later study in 1996 tested the continuing strength of ACR. James Hunter and Carl

Bowman conducted a Gallup-funded survey that included a somewhat more diverse cross

section of Americans. Ninety-three percent were Christians with the remaining 7% being

classified as "secularists" (Hunter, 71). It is not clear if "secularists" participants included

non-Christian religious traditions or a narrower group such as atheists and agnostics. To

gain insights into what the authors styled as "political culture", this group was surveyed

about a range of political, economic, and social topics, including their belief of the

following statements:

1. "it is important to teach children that America from its beginning has had a
    destiny to set an example for other nations." (87% agreed); and

2. "it is important to teach children that our nation was founded upon Biblical
    principles." (84% agreed).

Hunter and Bowman describe these results as indicative of "remarkably high levels of support for the 'American creed'" (Hunter 11). Upon examination, this "American creed" unmistakably overlaps with Bellah's ACR. (cf. Hunter 11 to Bellah, "Civil Religion" 7-8). Hunter and Bowman's first inquiry about America's destiny ties directly to Bellah's observation that America's leaders from Washington to Johnson used ACR as justifying American exceptionalism, or as Bellah phrases it, ACR includes a belief that "Europe is Egypt; America, the promise land" (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 8). Hunter and Bowman's second inquiry also harkens to Bellah's ACR by probing the Judeo-Christian origins of their American creed. Bellah posits that, "[t]hough much is selectively derived from Christianity, this religion [ACR] is clearly not itself Christianity." (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 4).

When unpacking Hunter and Bowman's findings, it is clear that Americans in 1996 believed that America was "founded" on Judeo-Christian "principles" and that concept should be taught to the next generation of Americans. This overlap justifies using Hunter and Bowman's findings of a strong American creed as a proxy for the prevalence of Bellah's ACR in 1995. As demonstrated in the graph below, the prevalence of ACR between Wimberley's survey and that of Hunter and Bowman shows a notable decline. That decline appears to be inversely correlated to a rise in pluralism, as measured by a decline in the percentage of Americans identifying as affiliated with the Judeo-Christian traditions (Gallup Religion). The following chart demonstrates these declines.

Figure 4: ACR Relative Strength and Judeo-Christian Prevalence 1970-1995

ACR Relative Strength and Judeo-Christian Prevalence 1970-1995
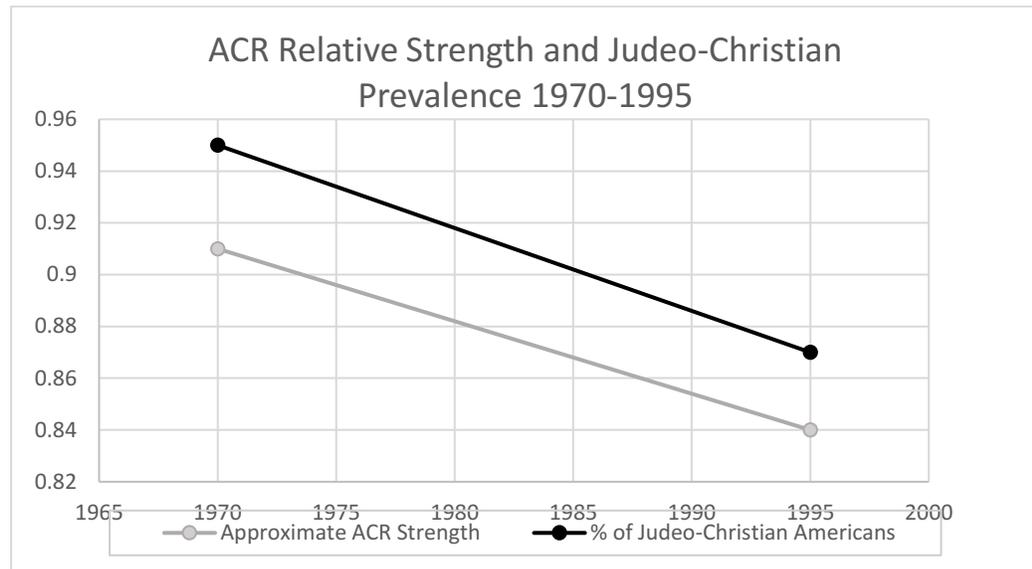
Sources: Gallup Religion (2016); Wimberley; Hunter and Bowman

Notably, the decline in Judeo-Christian adherents and the decline in ACR strength are not only the same directionally, but also very nearly at the same rate of change. While this is not enough to claim that increased pluralism caused ACR's decline, it appears as if the two may be correlated. The arguments to intuition in Chapter 2 that assert that pluralism weakened the ACR's attributes of chosen-ness, punishment and reward, and an ACR God provide some basis for thinking that the declines in pluralism and ACR's strength may be related. To be careful and clear, this thesis is not making that assertion but merely observes that a rational basis exists for the potential that pluralism reduces ACR's strength. More formal proof is left for future scholarship.

2015 Milepost: ACR Decreasing at a Decreasing Rate

A recent review of ACR's prevalence in America was conducted by Rutgers University in 2015. The survey used different questions to assess the existence of ACR.

Specifically, the survey's questions included the participants' agreement with the following statements,

- "The Founding Fathers instilled sacred values that have made America a great nation."

- "America is God's chosen nation."

- "It is the will of God that America be an example of freedom and equality for all nations."

- "Americans and our representatives in government ought to rededicate themselves to the sacred values of America."

Flavel Hickey analyzed this survey's results. (Hickey 16-17). Using a measure of the answers' reliability, Hickey determined the strength of ACR to be .801 (Hickey 17). Because ACR proper is the topic he investigates, Hickey's questions more squarely address Bellah's ACR than did Hunter's queries. In this respect, Hickey and Wimberley's survey share more common ground than does Hunter's survey which was intended to explore the closely related, yet distinct, topic of an American creed.

The noteworthy difference between Wimberley and Hickey relates to the measurement tools each used. Wimberley employed a relatively straightforward measurement of the percentage of respondents that agreed with the stated tenets of ACR. Hickey employed a relatively more sophisticated measurement technique that accounts for the consistency among answers and makes the results more conducive to data analysis. While inhibiting a precise comparison of the magnitude of the changes in

ACR, this difference in measurement approaches still allows for a "directionally correct" observation – to wit, that ACR's relative strength continued to decline over time.

In sum, the different questions and statistical measures in the Wimberley, Hunter, and Hickey studies prohibit a direct "apples-to-apples" comparison of their findings. While lacking the commonality for scientific validity or reliable data analysis, the questions and methods are comparable enough to reveal a directionally correct trend in the strength of ACR at the three points in time when the studies were conducted. The relative strength of ACR over time can be approximated as:

Figure 5: ACR Relative Strength and Judeo-Christian Prevalence 1970-1995-2015
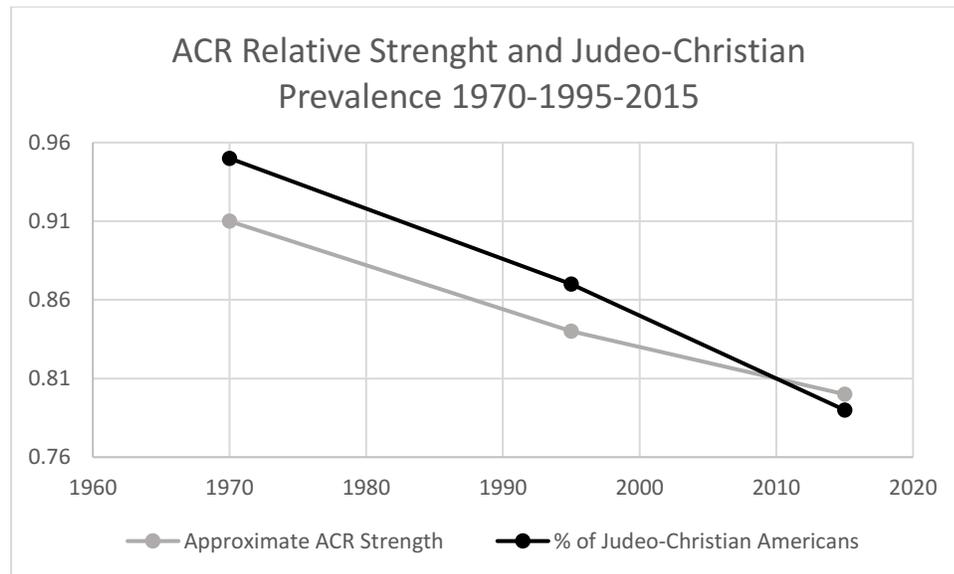
Sources: Gallup Religion (2016); Wimberley; Hunter and Bowman; Flavel

Qualitatively, this may be described as trending downward from "exceptionally strong" to "very strong" to "strong". The graph depicts a negative correlation to the rise in pluralism discussed in Chapter 2. The decrease in those identifying as Judeo-Christian

follows the same downward trend as the decreases in ACR for the three mileposts of 1970, 1995, and 2015.

The studies are too varied to definitively conclude that increases in pluralism caused declines in ACR. Nevertheless, as with the 1970 to 1995 comparison, the negative relationship between the two is notable. The intuitive, as opposed to empirical or causal, arguments are set out in the preceding chapter. Also of note is that, unlike the 1970 to 1995 mileposts, the rates of decline for 1995 to 2015 are not the same. ACR's decline is slowing, while the increase in pluralism – again measured as the percentage of Americans that do _not_ identify as Judeo-Christian – increases at a faster rate. One interpretation of this change in the rates of change is that while pluralism continues to increase, it's negative effect on ACR is not as great as before. If this is correct, ACR will be more stable going forward even if it continues to become less prevalent as pluralism increases. This means that even if pluralism reached a very high level, a disproportionate number of Americans will adhere to ACR. This suggests that ACR in its current form will continue to have relevancy into the foreseeable future. It also suggests that a redefined ACR - one that accounts for a more religiously plural America - may build from the current level of strength, reverse the trend, and even increase in prevalence going forward.

ACR Strength and ACR Scholarship

The three points in time approximate the changes in ACR that correspond with the emergence of each of the of the three threads of ACR scholarship. The 1970 milepost

near ACR's initial formulation reflects a strongly Christian nation and a high propensity to identify with the attributes Bellah designated as forming ACR. The 1995 milepost is a fair approximation of when the second thread of ACR scholarship emerged and at that milepost both an increase in pluralism and a decrease in ACR's strength are notable. Finally, the 2015 milepost is relatively close in time to the emergence of the most recent third thread of ACR scholarship. Again, the 2015 milepost data shows a continued increase in pluralism, while ACR's strength continues to decline. The following chapter takes up the impact that the trends in the pluralism and ACR's relative strength has had on each of the three threads of ACR scholarship.

Chapter IV

The Development of ACR Over Time:

The Three Threads of ACR at the Mileposts

In this chapter, the same milepost (or as close to them as is feasible) will be used to assess the developments of the three threads of ACR scholarship introduced in the first chapter. More precisely, ACR scholarship in the first outward-focused thread that addresses external conflict from 1978, 1995, and 2015 will be compared. The comparison will reveal a trend in this first thread from ACR's use of clearly religious reference points to marginally religious ones. The second, inward-focused thread of ACR scholarship emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, after the 1970 milepost. Select articles from this second thread, ACR articles written near the 1995 milepost and 2015 milepost will be compared. This comparison will demonstrate ACR's capacity to run counter to its purpose and divide Americans rather than serve as a basis for their unity. Finally, the third rationalizing thread of ACR scholarship from the period of 2012-2016 will be discussed as representative of the state of affairs at the 2015 milepost. This discussion will identify the recent approaches to replace, rework, or synthesize the effects from the trends identified during the review of the first and second threads. For each thread, the relationship of pluralism and ACR will be assessed as a causal factor for that thread's development.

The First Thread of ACR Scholarship:

Decreasing Religiosity in Outward Looking ACR

The first thread of ACR scholarship started with Bellah and continues to the present. These scholars assumed a perspective of ACR as an outward looking means of defining Americanism that originates from a Durkheimian bottom-up set of beliefs /practices. (Fuist, 681). The most poignant examples of this viewpoint address ACR's role in war. While Bellah developed ACR through examining America's first and second "times of trial" - the American Revolution and Civil War - he sought to extend ACR in response to a third time of trial - Vietnam. The first time of trial, the Revolutionary War, concerned Americans' independence. The second time of trial, the Civil War, concerned equality of Americans. (Bellah 15).

For Bellah, the ACR that emerged from the first and second times of trial cemented the tenet of ACR that required America to be exemplary. ACR was well positioned to serve as the appropriate and valuable answer to the villains that President Kennedy called "the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself" (Bellah 16). Bellah saw the Vietnam War as interrupting ACR's best use. He described it this way:

> [I]n the midst of this trend toward a less primitive conception of ourselves and our world, we have somehow, without anyone really intending it, stumbled into a military confrontation where we have come to feel that our honor is at stake. We have in a moment of uncertainty been tempted to rely on our overwhelming

physical power rather than on our intelligence, and we have, in part, succumbed to

this temptation. Bewildered and unnerved when our terrible power fails to bring

immediate success, we are at the edge of a chasm the depth of which no man

knows (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 17).

 Bellah then posits that ACR's "concern[] that America be a society as perfectly in accord

with the will of God as men can make it, and a light to all nations" should continue as the

standard for determining the right course of action in Vietnam. (Bellah 18). In this

context, Bellah certainly saw ACR as a defining and constructive element of what

Americans believe about themselves on a global stage, and what is worth the fight. That

is, Bellah's ACR set the American parameters for just war.

1970 Milepost: The Christian Vantage Early in the First Thread

Scholars continued, and still continue, to apply ACR as an outward-focused

doctrine to explicate Americans' distinctiveness both during discrete conflicts (Neuhaus,

137-38), and as a more generalized proposition of America's prerogative and obligation

to fight. (Haberski 3).   From very early on, others picked up Bellah's thread. Shortly

following Bellah's 1967 article, John Neuhaus posited in 1970, the first milepost date,

that ACR should be reworked to account for the new realities ensuing from the Vietnam

War. He argued that America's churches held the best position to reformulate ACR so

that America "can, not only avoid more Vietnams, but also 'be a blessing to the nations

of the earth'" (Neuhaus 140). When Neuhaus speaks of "churches" he means Christians.

This passage demonstrates the Judeo-Christian orientation of his perspective,

"Christianity-and, largely through Christianity, Judaism-is in symbiotic relationship to the

civil religion. Each supports the other; each lends plausibility to the other. The remarkable success of organized Christianity in America depends on the assumption that membership in a church is supportive of true Americanism. The American public values, similarly, depend upon the belief commitments that are nurtured by church and synagogue" (Neuhaus 138). When considering ACR, Neuhaus and Bellah's Judeo-Christian centrism is justified given that 96% of Americans were Christians or Jews. During the fifteen-year period following Bellah's work, others joined Neuhaus in his efforts by extending, broadening, or focusing ACR as a means of defining Americans in contrast to others. (*see e.g.*, Fenn, Hammond, Herberg, and Marty). These scholars, within a narrow enough range, also took a relatively monolithic Judeo-Christian view of America. It took some time for this view to change. But change it did.

1995 Milepost: The Broader Vantage in the Second Phase of the First Thread

Viewing ACR as an outward-looking concept, scholars continued this first thread even as the inward-looking second thread of ACR emerged in the late 1980s and the 1990s. Again, using war as the most extreme manifestation of this outward focus, scholars sustained the first thread by extending ACR to explain conflict in novel ways. A good example of this extension is Marvin and Ingle's 1996 article (nearly coincident with the second milepost of 1995), *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Revisiting Civil Religion.* In this article, Marvin and Ingle point to Bellah for their position that, "both sectarian and national religions organize killing energy by committing devotees to sacrifice themselves to the group" (767). They then borrow from Rene Girard and Mircea Eliade to place war in a "nation-state violence" context (775 at FN8),

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To admit that we kill our own is unacceptable, for if there is not shared agreement about who will be sacrificed, violence may become chaotic instead of ordered; the group may be destroyed. To keep the sacrificial secret, an acceptable pretext to slaughter group members must be created. What Girard calls the ritual victim constitutes this pretext. In the nation-group context, this is the enemy. In addition to a ritual victim, a second surrogate victim must stand in for members of our group against whom we have real grievances. [FN to Girard omitted] As a group we agree to kill members of a surrogate-victim sacrificial class expressly created for the purpose. Upon it we displace our anger at other members of our group. The ritual victim gives us an acceptable reason to kill our own. The surrogate victim is constituted in the portion of our group that we kill. The priestly class that trains for sacrifice at the hands of the American nation-group is the military. Soldiers live apart in monastic orders that discipline and purify themselves for ultimate sacrifice. The knowledge that the true object of sacrificial violence is ourselves is separated from devotees, as sacred things are, whenever it threatens to surface explicitly (774-775).

While retaining the first thread's outward focus, Marvin and Ingle's more academic, if not ecumenical, tone marks a shift from the squarely Judeo-Christian perspective that Neuhaus represents to a broader treatment of ACR. Marvin and Ingle's 'ritual' is identifiably a religious concept, but not as exclusively religious as Neuhaus' 'church'. During this time and for several of the following years, the outward focused, first thread of ACR scholars adopted the broader approach represented by Marvin and Ingle. (see e.g., Silk 2001; Swatos). As noted previously, by 1996, the increase in

America's religious pluralism rose to an appreciable level, with a decrease in Americans identifying as Judeo-Christians decreasing from 96% to 87%.

2015 Milepost: Is ACR Still Religious?

By 2012, near the third milepost of 2015, when Raymond Haberski wrote a modern, outward-focused account of ACR titled *God and War: American Civil Religion since 1945*, the percentage of American Christians and Jews had declined to 73%. Against this backdrop, Haberski details the role of ACR in America's nation-state conflicts starting with World War II and continuing to Vietnam, the Cold War, and Iraq/Afghanistan. He concludes his book with a description of ACR largely devoid of the religious elements so clearly identifiable in Neuhaus' church discussion and of the ritual elements present in Marvin and Ingle's discussion. He writes,

> We cannot live without myths and the symbols that represent them. And we cannot function as a people without a way to talk about, believe in, and yes, critique those myths. Civil religion does not exist outside of the group that uses it. And while it is prone to manipulation, civil religion is also the only way to acknowledge that we still need to believe in something worthy of the sacrifices that have been and will continue to be made in the name of the nation.

Haberski points to myth as ACR's foundational element and reason to exist. A valid explanation for this shift is that Bellah's Judeo-Christian perspective began to lose explanatory power in defining Americans just as American became increasingly less certain to be Christian or Jewish. That is, when Bellah first wrote about ACR 96% of Americans self -identified as Judeo-Christian. For Marvin and Ingle, that percentage was

87% and for Haberski, it was 73%. These statistics suggest that by the time Marvin and

Ingle examined Americans' identity in 1996, the church was beginning to lose its

symbolism as a nearly comprehensive representation of American society. This would

explain Marvin and Ingle's use of a less parochial yet clearly religious concept of ritual to

replace church in discussing the outward looking thread of ACR. Similarly, by the time

Haberski took up the topic of outward focused ACR, the further decline in the

homogeneity of American religion may well have compelled him to cast ACR in the

marginally religious term of a "myth." The Neuhaus -to- Marvin and Ingle -to-

Haberski's progression of casting the outward- focused ACR in terms of church-ritual-

myth demonstrates an attempt to broaden ACR to cover more Americans. The

consequence was that the first thread of ACR scholarship became more ambiguous, with

less certainty as to ACR's definition. A church community is easier to physically

identify than a ritual. In turn, a ritual possesses more physical certainty and less

malleability than a myth. In sum, the rise in pluralism led to greater complexity in the

outward focused first thread of ACR scholarship. As the following discussion shows, the

second thread provides little by way of clarification.

<p style="text-align:center">The Second Thread of ACR Scholarship:</p>

<p style="text-align:center">Inward Looking ACR from (Mostly) Divisive to (Only) Divisive</p>

In the midst of the outward-focused first thread's shift from a clearly religious

orientation for ACR to a more ecumenical or even secular one, the second thread of ACR

scholarship emerged. This second thread explores ACR's role in defining Americans from an internally focused perspective. That is, while the first thread uses ACR as a mechanism to define what being an American means relative to citizens of other countries, the second thread uses ACR as a mechanism to define what being an American means relative to fellow citizens. As the above first thread discussion demonstrates, war serves as a touchstone topic for the first thread's treatment of Americans in the world-at-large. Rather than conflict abroad, conflict within America serves as the benchmark subject for the second thread's treatment of using ACR of Americans relative to each other.

1995 Milepost: Inward Looking ACR as (Mostly) Divisive

When Bellah wrote that an attribute of ACR was that "[God] is actively interested and involved in history, with a special concern for America", he was setting the stage for his argument that America was accountable for failing to meet its obligations in the case of Vietnam. (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 7 and 18). From that starting point, and as the dust settled from the ending of the Cold War, Robert Wuthnow observed that ACR was becoming a political tool to distinguish one American from another rather than a means of all Americans defining themselves compared to other countries' citizens. (Wuthnow, "Divided" 395-6, Wuthnow, "Faith" 6). In his 1988 article, "Divided We Fall: America's Two Civil Religions*"* and 1995 article, "Faith and Public Affairs", Wuthnow sets out the two sects of ACR that he saw as active at that time. ("Divided", 396; "Faith", 5-6). One sect focused on the sanctity of America; that God had pre-ordained America's role as the righteous leader in the world. This sect contended that this status conferred if not a degree of infallibility, at least a predisposition toward rightness of action – a God-granted

benefit of the doubt of sorts. Not unlike Israel, America need only remain true to God's calling to maintain its preferred status. Although it is not entirely clear "who made who", those on the political right aligned with this ACR sect. Per Wuthnow, the political right equated conservative political positions to being true to God's will. ("Divided" 396). The positions extended beyond those with moral or religious implications, such as abortion and school prayer, to economic and social positions, such as a capitalistic, limited welfare state, and a limited federal government. (Wuthnow, "Faith" 7). Wuthnow points to religious leaders such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Francis Schaeffer, and Ronald Nash as proponents of this view ("Divided" 397). In sum, the politically conservative right aligned sect of ACR saw America's wealth and power as divine grants intended to enable America to evangelizing the world: not only the Gospel, but also to the American way of life as encapsulated by capitalism. (Wuthnow, "Divided" 396-7). Using Max Weber's terminology, Wuthnow describes this sect of inward-looking ACR as "priestly" ("Divided" 398). It legitimizes American government, wealth, power, and conduct as functions of divine sanction.

Wuthnow's second ACR sect focused not only on America's commendable attributes but on its transgressions as well. (Wuthnow, "Divided" 397). Rather than originating from a God-given mandate, America's obligation to right the world's wrongs stemmed from two more pedestrian sources: the fact that America created an appreciable level of the world's misery and the fact that America possesses vast resources. (Wuthnow, "Divided" 397). This cause and capabilities tandem placed the obligation to improve the human condition squarely on American shoulders. ACR then was a matter of "creat[ing] social and economic justice for all God's children." (Wuthnow, "Divided"

398). Faith played a valuable role in ACR not because it imbued believers with the first

sect's sense of America's divine purpose, but simply because it promoted and motivated

Americans to act to improve the human condition (Wuthnow, "Divided" 398-99). Like

the first sect, Wuthnow's second ACR sect aligned with a political view – in this case, the

liberal left. Also, like the first sect, the second sect did not confine the application of

ACR to issues with obviously religious or moral connotations, but extended America's

obligations to the world to include social issues such as arms reduction and

environmental protection (Wuthnow, "Divided" 398). Proponents of this sect's

perspective included John Langan and influential collective Clergy and Laity Concerned

who counted Martin Luther King, Jr. and Abraham Heschel among its founders

(Wuthnow, "Divided" 396). In Max Weber's terminology, this liberal sect of inward-

looking ACR is "prophetic". It casts American government, wealth, power, and conduct

in terms of America's relation to transcendent concerns for all humanity (Wuthnow,

"Divided" 398).

Importantly, Wuthnow identified the conservative and liberal sects' shared

dedication to free speech principles and their tolerance of dissenting voices. He cites this

dedication as an extremely important mitigating factor to what clearly was a divisive use

of ACR. He writes,

But I also have in mind something other than the civil religion as an

underlying cultural premise for the liberal and conservative conceptions of public

religion. It is probably best captured in the slogan about agreeing to disagree. We

may cherish consensus and, failing to achieve it, throw up our hands and resign

ourselves to being in disagreement. That might be the outcome of a discussion

between spouses who love each other deeply. But in American public life, we generally take a much more positive attitude toward disagreement. In politics, we expect Republicans and Democrats to disagree about virtually everything. Sometimes we get tired of their rhetoric, but we worry more when we think the two have become like Tweedledee and Tweedledum, failing to express genuine differences, and we would worry even more at the prospect of a single-party political system. . . So, it is perhaps not unexpected that things should be no different in the religious sphere.

Insofar as [conservative and liberal religions] articulate different myths of national origin and different definitions of national purpose, it seems fair to say that they differ over the character of American civil religion itself. But if civil religion is taken, as it is by some, to be the underlying ground basis of the culture that is by definition consensual, then we can still identify two very different public theologies or strands of public religion. They are part of our story of ourselves, providing the narrative framework in which we are likely to cast interpretations of ourselves well into the future. (Wuthnow, "Faith" 145-146)

As Wuthnow delineates above, at the 1995 milepost, the second thread of ACR scholarship fully recognized the divisive quality of an inward-focused ACR. Yet, from an American take on 'viva le difference', Americans' commitment to accommodating differing views allowed for the two opposing sects of an inward-focused ACR to maintain a unifying dimension to ACR. That is, even though the purpose each sect assigned to ACR differed dramatically, the conversation and debate over ACR was seen

as an American exercise – the dialog itself unified the members of the respective sects as Americans.

Culture Wars as Driving the Second Thread's Development. So why did this second inward-looking thread of ACR scholarship emerge? As demonstrated in the prior section while discussing the first thread, the outward looking thread of ACR scholarship concerned itself with the relationship of Americans vis-à-vis other countries. Overt, or at least recognizable, conflicts between nation-states represent the most immediate forum for making the America vs. Non-American distinction. As pluralism increased within the United States, the vocabulary of ACR softened from clearly identifiably religious to less so. The second inward focused thread of ACR scholarship also stemmed from conflict, albeit, and logically so, a conflict within America itself. The specific nomenclature assigned to this conflict is the "culture wars".

As Stephen Carter explicates well, the pluralism element of the culture wars pushed religious conversation from the private confines of churches and homes to public square (Carter 119). While Carter's larger question about the appropriate content of that conversation is beyond the scope of this thesis, the second inward-looking ACR thread served as one response to religious conversation becoming much more prevalent in the public forum. The inward-looking version of ACR provided a mechanism to explicitly adopt political positions packaged as America's shared religion. (Carter 51-2). That is, increased religious diversity significantly contributed to the culture wars which led scholars to push ACR in an entirely new direction. In this sense, the second inward-looking thread of ACR was a response to pluralism. Increased pluralism meant Judeo-Christian principles alone were no longer sufficient to maintain unity. ACR has always

been a mix of religion and politics. Pluralism changes the relative proportion to more political. By the last milepost, the shift had become so severe as to threaten ACR's very viability.

Milepost 2015: Inward Looking ACR as (Only) Divisive

By 2015, the second, inward-focused thread of ACR scholarship developed so that the divisiveness remained, but the fundamental tolerance of competing views eroded (Silk 33-34; Fuist and Williams 682). This later second thread scholarship retains Wuthnow's politically conservative/ priestly versus politically liberal/prophetic distinction (Silk 37). It is devoid, however, of the celebration of different views that Wuthnow saw as a unifying aspect of inward looking ACR. Mark Silk argues that inward looking civil religion has become so divisive that it no longer can be considered as ACR at all. Rather, it must be segregated to another concept monikered "political religion" (Silk 33). He describes the renamed current inward-looking conservative versus liberal ACR sects' relationship as,

According to Gentile, [political religion] is a totalitarian exercise: "Intolerant, invasive, and fundamentalist, and it wishes to permeate every aspect of an individual's life and of a society's collective life." That involves the kind of sacralization of the political order that the Nazis and Italian Fascists contrived for their revolutionary states. If the Republican political religion of our time falls short of this extreme ideal type, it nevertheless has been constructed not as a sacred umbrella under which the political system and civil society as a whole

function, but as a weapon in the service of partisan combat and culture war. (Silk

33, citing Gentile xv).

As Silk exemplifies, the more recent second-thread scholars find the

conservative/priestly sect to be ardent observers of their version of ACR and willing to

use it to divide rather than unify Americans. That is not to say that the liberal/prophetic

sect has had any greater unifying effect. The conservative/priestly sect uses ACR

religious symbols such as the flag and public prayer and, as discussed above, propounds a

doctrine of America as a God-ordained enterprise to exclude those who do not ascribe to

these practices and precepts as un-American (Silk 38). In contrast, the current

liberal/prophetic approach divides Americans not because that sect has become more

adamant about the "mission" of America, but because that sect has become less vocal in

advocating its stance. That is, the political liberals have left the prophetic sect in favor of

a more strictly secular position. For example, popular sovereignty is no longer cast as a

transcendent calling to divine rights of freedom, but is now framed as a function of rising

nationalism. (Tipton 17). In sum, at the 2015 milepost, the state of the second inward-

looking thread of ACR is that the conservative/priestly sect has used ACR to divide

Americans, and the liberal/prophetic sect has abandoned using ACR altogether.

Pluralism's Role in the Second Thread

Pluralism plays a role in the current state of inward looking ACR just as it did in

prompting the emergence of the second thread. At the 1995 milepost, the culture wars

drew ACR scholars' focus to the relationship between Americans because America no

longer possessed the relatively religious homogeneity that existed when Bellah

formulated ACR. Inward-looking ACR such as Wuthnow's provided a means of

accounting the distinctions in an America that was increasingly diverse across many

dimensions including Americans' religious affiliations. At the 1995 milepost, the debate

as to what ACR meant within a context internal to America was clearly delineated, but

scholars predicted (or perhaps hoped) that the debate between the inward-looking ACR

sects may result in a broader and more inclusive version of ACR. As religious pluralism

increased from 1995 to 2015, that prediction remained unfulfilled and increasingly

unlikely.

The increase in religious pluralism as indicated by 13% of Americans identifying

as non-Christian/Jewish in 1995 to the 27% in 2015 appears to have removed the impetus

for either sect to employ ACR as a unifying creed. For the conservative/priestly sect,

increased pluralism emphasizes the "other among us" and leads to the 'ACR as a

weapon' that Silk describes. For the liberal/prophetic sect, increased pluralism creates a

challenge to create an all-inclusive version of ACR by removing a common religious

orientation that serves as a foundation for adapting ACR in ways that unify Americans.

Thus, the result to date of turning ACR's focus inwardly is that ACR is not

merely becoming less clearly recognizable as a religious idea as indicated by the first

thread's trend. Rather, ACR has become something more nefarious - a basis for

separating Americans from each other.

The Third Thread of ACR Scholarship: Any Help to be Found?

Replacing/Reworking/Synthesizing ACR

Bellah's seminal article and the scholarship that followed all worked from the central premise that ACR explicated Americans' unity as a collective; a unity that extended beyond a social contract or cultural affinity that resonated with a deeper-seated, transcendent quality of human experience. That is, ACR is religious (Bellah, *Broken Covenant* xix-xxi).   Against this backdrop, the cumulative effect of the current conclusions from ACR scholarship's first and second threads do no less than imperil the validity of ACR. In response, a third thread has emerged that seeks to re-examine ACR in ways that both account for America's increased diversity and maintain ACR's quality of unifying Americans. The attempts are wide-ranging. Three scholars - Jose Santiago, Peter Luchau, and Jermaine McDonald - provide examples of the varied approaches. Because this third replace/rework/synthesize thread emerged in earnest after the first two mileposts of 1970 and 1995, the discussion of this third thread is confined to the relatively contemporary period, or as of 2015 milepost.

2015 Milepost: ACR 2.0

The current attempts to synthesize prior ACR scholarship or to entirely rework the concept fall into three categories: 1) simply replace ACR with another concept, such as nationalism; 2) rework ACR to become more multi-dimensional, such as recognizing that ACR simultaneously may be a rhetoric and a phenomenon; and 3) maintain the

original attributes of ACR, but add missing voices to the concept's definition. An example of each category follows.

Replacement Approach. Jose Santiago sees ACR as unsalvageable. In fact, it is already dead. In the context of discussing religion writ large and civil religion specifically, he states, "Religion has lost it capacity to bring together different sacred forms under the one united banner of a moral universe" (Santiago 399). He argues that social, economic, and political developments have rendered religious precepts ineffective as a basis for commonality among a set of citizens. He writes,

> [T]he process of rationalization has created a world where social integration is no longer the result of consensus over religious standards and values. In the modern world, the coordination of social action may be the result of the mechanics of political domination or of the economic constraints of capitalism, neither of which needs a cultural or religious framework. Social integration, therefore, does not require a shared "sacred center" (Santiago 399).

What, if anything, can take ACR's place? Santiago argues for nationalism. "[N]ationalism would be the religion of modern times, or one of its functional equivalents. The key to understanding the sanctification of nationalism can be found in the process of sanctifying culture, whereby culture becomes independent of religion and the church" (397-398). Santiago's position can readily be seen as the logical extension of the first thread's trend of making ACR less explicitly religious. Santiago is advocating that we quit 'watering down' ACR and just give it up entirely. While others are sympathetic to this view (see Powers 260-261), his is not the only perspective on ACR in modern America.

Rework Approach. Peter Luchau reimagines ARC as a fluid, adaptable concept where ACR is "mostly rhetoric" in some contexts and "mostly phenomenon" in others. (Luchau 382-383). Rhetoric is the public discourse about ACR that includes speeches, ceremonies, and symbols that express civil religion as a shared vocabulary. Phenomenon is the act of adherence and social recognition of civil religion (Luchau 380). Luchau proposes that the tools that allow ACR to slide along a scale between rhetoric and phenomena are integration, legitimization, and prophecy (379, 381, 382). Integration is an acceptance of the civil religion by a "sociological majority" that can effect a change without the "country breaking down" (Lucha, 380). Legitimization is civil religion's independence, or ability to stand apart, from both church and state. (Luchau 381). Prophecy is the ability to "distinguish between 'true and false' civil religion" (Luchau 382), which is substantially consistent with Martin Marty's early use of "prophetic" civil religion (Marty 147).

Luchau offers five elements of civil religion by adding the presence of a divine being and that the divine being be non-offensive to integration, independence, and a prophetic potential (Luchau, 377). These elements are malleable, subject to redefinition, and less important than the recognition that the rhetoric and phenomenon characteristics allow for context-specific versions of civil religion (Luchau, 384). Luchau argues that the reconstituted civil religion he describes captures nearly all prior civil religion definitions and provides a means to further analyze civil religion as it continues to develop. (Luchau 384-385). Given the breadth of his definition, Luchau's claim has merit. Whether the definition has value beyond serving as an analytic tool is a different question.

Synthesis Approach. Jermaine McDonald argues that ACR continues to have viability in an increasingly religious diverse America. He points to 9/11 as America's fourth time of trial (recall that Bellah identified the revolutionary war, civil war, and Vietnam War as the first, second, and third times of trial). McDonald revisits the third time of trial to account for the influence of Martin Luther King, Jr. during that period, which McDonald sees not as a referendum on Vietnam, but as a test of America's ability to include "others" as full citizens. McDonald describes the increase in the Muslim population in the United States as giving rise to the fourth time of trial; a trial accelerated but not caused by 9/11 (McDonald 53-54). He cites President Bush's distinction between Al Qaeda, as "them", versus Islam, which is some of "us", as a use of ACR to unify Americans on a basis that extends beyond the Judeo-Christian principles of Bellah's ACR (McDonald 55). McDonald views President Bush's stance as promoting tolerance (McDonald 56). Advancing the concept, President Obama's 2008 inauguration speech promoted inclusion on the basis of an ACR that transcends the "lines of tribe" (McDonald 57).

McDonald then discusses several American Islamic leaders' contributions, including the leader of the Sufi mosque in Manhattan, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, to defining ACR in ways that include Muslim Americans (McDonald 59). Stories of Muslim Americans' heroism on 9/11 and examples of cooperation in developing the Manhattan Islamic community center serve as "sacred stories" that may become part of ACR. McDonald concludes that if these sacred stories persist and others are added, the fourth time of trial will lead to recognizing Muslim Americans as legitimate citizens (McDonald, 61). Unfortunately, he goes no further.

Reasons for the Third Thread

Beyond reconciling the less religious ACR and the divisive ACR identified

respectively in the first and second threads of scholarship, the third thread takes head-on

the effect of increased pluralism in America. These scholars implicitly recognize that the

27% of non-Judeo/Christians in America today fundamentally alter Bellah's conception

of ACR developed when only 4% of Americans identified as not Christian or Jewish.

Each of the third-thread scholar's approaches significantly adds to our understanding of

ACR today and how it may develop in the future. Each also suffers from flaws – some

fatal, some less so – that inhibit adopting them in the whole. The next chapter will

critique the merit of each approach and argue for pursuing a synthesizing approach that

keeps ACR's traditional framework while redefining each ACR element as a starting

point for future advancements in ACR scholarship.

Chapter V

ACR for Future Times:

Back to Bellah as a Way Ahead

Americans' unity resides at the core of ACR. Bellah may have attempted to simply describe the attributes of a set of beliefs that unite Americans – a descriptive religion that Americans in fact practice. Or perhaps he saw ACR as more ambitious and was setting out the doctrinal tenets of a religion Americans should adhere to – a prescriptive religion that Americans ought to practice together. Bellah is not entirely clear about whether he intends ACR to be empirical or normative. A fair reading suggests that ACR functions as both. And therein lies ACR's greatest utility - its framework that describes and promotes a unifying, common set of beliefs that Americans' hold about themselves and their country. ACR describes what Americans as Americans do, what they ought to do, and what motivates them to do it

The third thread of ACR scholarship is in large part a search for an alternative framework that maintains empirical and normative aspects while accounting for the American element inherent in ACR. The search is in large part a response to ACR's decreasing strength in the face of an increasingly religiously diverse America. Some scholars, like Santiago, look to address ACR's loss of empirical power by positing an alternative that they think better reflects a pluralistic America. Others, such as Luchau, seek to re-imagine ACR as a means of restoring the original ACR's empirical

explanatory power as well as its normative aspirational power. Yet others, like McDonald, are responding mostly to ACR's decreasing normative power and advocating for adding new voices to the ACR dialectic as a means of unifying Americans. This Chapter 5 includes critiques of this scholarship. The critiques demonstrate that while each approach furthers our understanding of ACR, none entirely succeeds in offering a proficient substitute for Bellah's original formulation of the concept. The thesis concludes by arguing for maintaining Bellah's framework comprised of its five attributes but revisiting each attribute in light of an increasingly pluralistic America. A brief description of how each attribute may be redefined is set out for other scholars' consideration and refinement.

Critiques of the ACR Response to Pluralism: Testing the Alternatives' Efficacy

Starting from the assumption that ACR's value resides in its three synchronizing qualities of empirical, normative, and a uniquely American motivation. The empirical quality describes how Americans act. The normative quality delivers direction for how Americans ought to act. The uniquely American motivation quality provides an explanation as to why the empirical observation and the normative guidance are properly viewed as 'American'. Given these qualities, a test case may be constructed to assess the viability of each proposed substitute for Bellah's initial ACR. That test may be framed according to how well the substitute accommodates the statement,

"Americans do X, because being American means believing Y."

Two examples illustrate this: "Americans tolerate dissenting opinions because being American means to believe in the sanctity of the Constitution which provides for free speech" and "Americans recognize elected officials' authority because to be American means to believe in the nation's heritage of honoring the results of the democratic process." The generic statement has three components. First, "Americans do X" tests whether the substitute accounts for the empirical quality of ACR. That is, can the ACR substitute adequately capture the collective actions that Americans undertake? Second, "believing Y" tests whether the substitute accounts for the normative quality of ACR because belief statements implicitly relate to normative assertions as to proper action (M. Smith 59). That is, can the substitute for the original ACR reflect a position as to how Americans ought to act?

Finally, tying the first two components together "because being American means" tests whether the substitute for the original ACR provides a framework for explaining why an observable action is motivated by a belief that may be attributable to being an American. Underlying the Bellah ACR's unity are deeply held convictions, not social contract obligations or cultural affinity (Bellah, *Broken Covenant* xix-xxi). Accordingly, this last component tying action to belief serves a crucial purpose. It enables some determination of whether collective behavior can be characterized as "American" as opposed to "capitalistic", "democratic", or some other more generally applicable category. The test operates by exclusion. If a collective behavior can be assigned a generally applicable category, then it fails to provide the "American motivation" characteristic inherent in ACR. If by default, a framework accommodates the situation

where the tie between X and Y is uniquely American, then it sufficiently replicates this aspect of Bellah's ACR.

The discussion below uses the test statement to assess each of the substitutes for Bellah's original ACR for those proposed substitutes' respective capacities to: explain American collective behavior; account for normative principles as to how Americans ought to act; and provide an American, transcendent motivation that links the empirical observations with the normative precepts.

Replacing ACR – Strengths and Weaknesses

As discussed in Chapter 4, Santiago argues that ACR's usefulness has expired and a secular doctrine should replace it. He argues for nationalism as the appropriate substitute for the role ACR played.

Empirical Capability. When considering whether a secular substitute for ACR can sufficiently account for the "Americans do X" component of the test statement, the answer is a clear "yes". Santiago makes a compelling case that nationalism adequately accounts for the American experience empirically (Santiago 399). Americans do act in ways that can fairly be described as promoting America as a nation-state. "Americans tolerate dissenting opinions" and "Americans recognize elected officials' authority" are assertions consistent with a secular concept such as nationalism. More broadly, a non-religious account of concerted American action may describe Americans' behavior without the religious attributes present in ACR. That is, the lack of explanatory power is not a weakness that defeats the argument for replacing ACR.

Normative Capability. A secular substitute for ACR also accounts for "Americans believe Y" component of the test statement. For instance, a secular doctrine can accommodate that Americans ought to tolerate dissenting opinions because they should believe in the Constitution which provides for free speech" (note the omission of "the sanctity of" phrase from the example previously provided). Similarly, Americans should recognize elected officials' authority because they should "believe in the nation's heritage of honoring the results of the democratic process". After omitting the "sanctity" reference, which matters for the third capability discussed below but less for purposes of assessing the normative capability, a religious element is not necessary to maintain the validity of these statements. A religious impetus is not necessary to compel following society's laws or even customs. Thus, a secular replacement for ACR such as Santiago's nationalism appears capable of delivering empirical and normative aspects equivalent to those delivered by Bellah's ACR.

American Motive Capability. The case for replacing ACR with a secular equivalent fails the test statement's third component. Using a secular replacement for ACR in the context of supporting the "because to be an American means" results in losing the compelling transcendent quality for being an American that is present in Bellah's ACR. Neither nationalism nor another secular doctrine adequately provides a basis for a belief system that unifies Americans at the transcending level incorporated into Bellah's ACR. Turning to the test statement, "Americans tolerate dissenting opinions because being American means to believe in the sanctity of the Constitution which provides for free speech" is transcendent only if the "sanctity" of the controlling law is invoked. Otherwise, honoring the rule of law becomes an exercise in logical

reasoning that requires no transcendent appeal to any particular authority, and certainly not one to which Americans solely may lay claim. Put another way, a secular replacement for ACR lacks the uniqueness that makes a normative statement "American" and therefore provides no motivation to collectively act in their capacity as Americans. The argument to replace ACR in effect posits that transcendence beyond self-interest is not necessary to inspire the unity needed to act for the common good. This assertion is countered by sociologists and religious scholars who argue that transcendence beyond oneself is a prime source for prompting collective action (Williams 203, Loveland, Sartain 13-14). Since the assertion that 'transcendence is not necessary for collective motivation' remains uncertain, yet that assertion must be true for a secular replacement to fully supplant ACR, the secular replacement option fails as an optimal substitute for the original ACR.

Rework ACR – Strengths and Weaknesses

Recall from Chapter 4 that rather than scrapping ACR entirely, Luchau proposes abandoning the Bellah ACR's structure and replacing it with a more fluid model that varies along a spectrum bound by rhetoric, which is public speech about ACR, and phenomenon, which is individual or collective practice of ACR rituals (Luchau 383). The tools for moving along the spectrum are integration, legitimization, and prophecy (Luchau 384). Depending on the context in which ACR is discussed, Luchau sees the definition of ACR morphing to account for that context.

Empirical Capability. The strength of such an approach is that it allows for ACR to vary in ways that reflect a more pluralistic America. The ACR concept is then

deployed in various forms that allow it to change within the parameters of maintaining

the character of rhetoric, phenomenon, or a mix of the two, to fit the context in which it is

used. Such an ACR almost unfailingly will account for empirical observations. The

precise definition of ACR will be framed in a manner sufficient to describe the

circumstance under review. A reworked ACR such as Luchau posits then possesses

empirical power to explain a pluralistic America. That is, it has appreciable empirical

power to describe the "Americans do X" component of the test statement.

Normative Capability. Reworking ACR in the way Luchau envisions, however,

results in an ACR that fails to deliver the normative guidance necessary to direct

collective action by Americans. A reworked ACR that runs along a rhetoric/phenomenon

spectrum leads to a shifting conception of ACR, which becomes amorphous and loses its

ability to guide unified action. That is, ACR configured in this way fails to accommodate

the "Americans believe Y" component of the test statement. By moving along a

spectrum that allows a principle to be categorized as a broadly, universally applicable

rhetoric or as a narrowly, individually applicable phenomenon leave a great deal of room

for legitimate disagreement about whether every American ought to take a certain course

of action. An ACR that allows for each listener to adopt their own independent view of

what an ACR "principle" means provides little to unite Americans. Each might fairly

interpret a reference to the ACR principle at very different points on the ACR spectrum

as a broadly applicable rhetoric or a narrowly applicable phenomenon and come to

different conclusions as to what Americans believe, and therefore ought to do.

Importantly, this is different than disagreeing about how to apply a commonly

understood ACR precept to a specific situation. In contrast, a fluid ACR does not

accommodate even a disagreement of this sort. With no common understanding of what principles belong in ACR, there is no basis for a dialog as to how to apply ACR to determine what an American ought to do. For instance, in the test statement, "Americans tolerate dissenting opinions because being American means to believe in the sanctity of the Constitution which provides for free speech" what is the reference to "the sanctity of the Constitution which provides for free speech?" Is it a rhetorical truism that applies to all Americans? Or is it a phenomenon of ACR practiced by some Americans, but as a phenomenon, lacks the force of authority to dictate what an American ought to do? At a general level, under a reworked ACR, there is no facility for a commonly acceptable "Americans believe Y" that enables debate about Y. An ACR this fluid leaves Americans without a "Y" to inform them what they ought to do.

American Motive Capability. Beyond this, a reworked ACR also fails to provide a motivation for an American collective action. Luchau's reworked ACR possesses a certain intellectual appeal because its lack of hard parameters leaves ACR in the realm of the conceptual. This fluidity, however, also leaves little in the way of explaining the motivation behind American collective action. The lack of definition leaves the reworked ACR without a context to endow "because to be an American means" with a capability to motivate collective action. Further, contrary to ACR's function of unifying Americans, a fluid ACR may well present those who use the Bellah version of ACR to distinguish some Americans from others (i.e., the politically conservative versus liberal factions that are the topic of the second thread of ACR scholarship) with an even more divisive tool. A fluid ACR is susceptible to being defined specifically to include as Americans only those who share the same political agenda. If used in this way, a reworked ACR applied to an

increasingly pluralistic America will lead to incorporating polarizing views into ACR. These divisive views then may be argued to constitute the commonly accepted American values that ACR is intended to sustain.

ACR Synthesized – Strengths and Weaknesses: Empirical, Normative, and American Motive Capabilities

McDonald offers another option to replacing or reworking ACR. He suggests that the framework of Bellah's ACR should be maintained, but that additional voices from non-Judeo-Christian religions be added or synthesized into ACR. Such an approach ostensibly would maintain the original ACR's utility of providing empirical, normative, and American motive capabilities. The entire test statement, "Americans tolerate dissenting opinions because being American means to believe in the sanctity of the Constitution which provides for free speech" holds, at least superficially.

Despite its surface appeal, the synthesis approach fails to acknowledge the very issue this thesis addresses: the observation set out in Chapter 3 that ACR is declining in strength as America becomes increasingly pluralistic. Without resolving this circumstance, a synthesis of the sort McDonald proposes will further convolute ACR's role. Merely adding Muslim, Buddhist, Spiritualist or other voices to the ACR conversation does not in itself address the ongoing viability of ACR. If the existing ACR framework along with its existing attributes is kept intact, these new perspectives will run into the issues discussed in Chapter 2 that account for ACR's decline.

McDonald recognized the value of keeping ACR's existing framework. He just did not explicate the changes to each attribute that are necessary if ACR is to continue as

a viable concept in the face of increasing pluralism. The section that follows will provide

a cursory, first attempt to address potential changes on an attribute-by-attribute basis with

a view toward enabling future scholars to assess ways for ACR to remain viable in the

future.

ACR Attributes Revisited – A Proposed Way Ahead

Chapter 1 described Bellah's original formulation of ACR, its attributes and

described ACR's unifying effect on Americans. Chapter 2 posited potential effects of

increasing pluralism on each ACR attribute. Chapter 3 demonstrated the reality of the

incongruity between ACR's attributes and ACR's ability to remain viable as pluralism

increases. Chapter 4 discussed the effects of changes in pluralism on ACR scholarship

over time. This Chapter described the strength and weaknesses of recent scholars'

attempts to maintain the explanatory, normative, and motivating power that ACR initially

delivered so well. To further this objective, the thesis concludes below by briefly

discussing how each ACR attribute may be re-addressed to account for a pluralistic

America. Such a cursory discussion cannot be a definitive set of new ACR attributes.

Hopefully, it will serve as a step in that progression.

Chosen-ness Revisited

Bellah's ACR included an attribute of American exceptionalism stemming from

the belief that America holds a divinely ordained place in the world. As discussed in

Chapter 2, exceptionalism's roots in the Christian heritage make pluralism a weakening

factor for the original ACR as pluralism increases. ACR's ascription to a higher

authority as the source of America's exceptional role must be maintained to keep its normative and/or American motive capabilities discussed in the first section of this chapter. With that constraint, the definition of 'divinely ordained' must be broadened to account for increased pluralism. One such reconstruction of 'a divinely ordained place in the world' might be to replace it with 'a position of moral authority in the world'.

This modification will involve a trade-off. Keeping 'divinely ordained' would provide least a marginally greater impetus for mandating a belief in ACR. A belief in the divine would require acknowledging ACR. Using 'moral authority' instead would broaden ACR's appeal as pluralism continues to increase in America as the term is accessible to those who do not otherwise believe in a divine being. Also, removing 'divine' authority as the source of America's exceptionalism may further complicate exceptionalism's relationship to other ACR attributes, such as the definition of God. All in, the attribute of exceptionalism allows ACR to serve as a basis for Americans' proactively engaging in world. This valuable use justifies the scholars' efforts to expand the chosen-ness attribute to apply to all Americans.

Religious Tolerance Revisited

The second attribute of Bellah's ACR is religious tolerance. Chapter 2 described how the existence of a large majority of Americans with Judeo-Christian affiliations made religious tolerance an ideal, not a "live option" at the time Bellah formulated ACR. That chapter then set out the potential for pluralism to lead to an "others within" mentality whereby religious tolerance divided Americans. For religious tolerance to support ACR's continued viability in the face of increasing pluralism, a practical version

of tolerance must become reality and not a rhetorical ideal. The means to incorporate

tolerance as a reality must include enforcement of legal obligation against religious

discrimination which will act a threshold perquisite to enduring changes. The enduring

changes must take the form of cultural mores whereby Americans value rather than

obstruct religious views of others. Such an undertaking represents a fundamental shift in

American society. ACR holds a symbiotic role in this shift - it needs the shift to survive

but the shift can certainly use ACR as a means to facilitate the achievement of change.

All such struggles involving 'hearts and minds' are ongoing ones, and the most that can

be expected of ACR is that it progresses the advance of religious tolerance from principle

to practice.

Definition of ACR's God Revisited

The third of the five attributes of Bellah's ACR is a deity that is intelligible,

pragmatic, and readily identifiable by Judeo-Christians. Chapter 2 posited that pluralism

weakens the utility of Bellah's definition of ACR's God because some, but not all, non-

Judeo-Christian Americans find such a deity less familiar. Bellah observed that

Presidents from Washington to Kennedy made some mention of God in public addresses

(Bellah, "Civil Religion" 3). Astutely, he also observed that Presidents often used

broader terms when referring to the ACR deity such as "Creator", "Supreme Judge of the

world", and "that Being who leads us" (Bellah, "Civil Religion" 7-8). The latter

references leave room for a deity, even one without a personified form, that may serve as

ACR's deity going forward.   A conceptualization of such a deity as the "source of

rightness" suffices. Even the subject of Tillich's "ultimate concern," which

accommodates even the absence of a God while contending for the existence of a source

that supersedes self, will work (Tillich, 2, 52). A broader definition of ACR's God such as this allows a pluralistic America to identify with a common, and importantly, an accessible source of ACR's authority. Such a conception of ACR's ultimate source of authority allows for religions' transcendent phenomena to fall within the ACR definition without subjecting those phenomena to being redefined. The definition is an umbrella that is broad enough to accommodate all religions without doing violence to those religions' tenets. A sovereign authority that governs ACR reconceptualized in this way may be recognized by practically all Americans.

Punishment and Reward Revisited

ACR's attribute of punishment and reward finds its basis in the righteousness of America as an actor in the world. Chapter 2 argued that increases in pluralism make the association with a Judeo-Christian oriented reward/punishment framework at least somewhat less accessible to Americans as America becomes more religiously diverse. To make this attribute more accessible in a pluralist America, it must be expressed in a manner that accounts for differing religious beliefs. One such new expression may be "ascending toward a better state". That formulation may refer to America's progress, rather than its reward, for proper collective action and America's digression, rather than punishment for improper collective action. Some with Judeo-Christian affiliations may see this as no more than a semantic distinction. That is good, because they likely will find it unobjectionable. Other Americans with a Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, or Spiritual affiliation may perceive progress and digress as more congruent with their religious beliefs. The change in this attribute would accordingly make ACR more accessible to more Americans as pluralism increases.

Afterlife Revisited

Afterlife for ACR purposes means that American sacrifice has enduring meaning.

As noted in Chapter 2, the ACR afterlife attribute already appears to have a broad

ecumenical appeal. For that reason, this attribute need not be reconstituted to account for

America's increasing levels of pluralism.

ACR from Here

The unifying aspect of the ACR that Bellah identified in 1967 has proven to have

explicatory power for a broad range of scholarly inquiries. As this thesis sets out, that

power is in decline as religious pluralism becomes an ever more prominent component of

the American landscape. The threat of pluralism to ACR is that it robs ACR of its

unifying power. Certainly, America's need for sources of unification is as great as it has

ever been. Keeping ACR's original framework, while redefining its attributes, may allow

it to continue to serve as one source of American unity.

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